





THE NATURAL HISTORY OF A LOS ANGELES TYPESTICKER

William M. Cheney

Interviewed by Richard F. Docter

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

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Photograph of William Cheney by Muir Dawson.

INTRODUCTION

Will Cheney's output has decreased markedly since he closed the Press in the Gatehouse in 1974, but interest in him has not. As this preface was being written Mary Lutz Jones's bibliography of Cheney imprints was published,¹ an exhibit was mounted at the Clark Library, and Glen Dawson is trying to persuade Will to write and print a miniature autobiography. Mrs. H. Richard Archer has placed in the Clark Library Cheney's letters to her late husband. These are so full of good material that it is to be hoped that someone will distill another volume of Cheney letters similar to the one existing.²

And of course, this oral history text is being readied for the shelf. It does not by itself give a picture of the whole man, especially his Puckish side, but it is an important addition to the comparatively few treatments of Will Cheney available.³ The interviewer, Richard Docter, drew from the printer among other things considerable information on a period very little

1. Mary Lutz Jones, A Los Angeles Typesticker: William M. Cheney, a Bibliography of His Printed Work. Los Angeles, 1981.

2. A Natural History of the Typestickers of Los Angeles, compiled from the Letters of Wm. M. Cheney by Edwin H. Carpenter. Los Angeles: Rounce & Coffin Club, 1960.

3. See the bibliography in Jones, A Los Angeles Type-sticker, pp. 93-95.

treated: Cheney's family background, his birth in Los Angeles, and the homes, neighborhoods, and schools of his growing up there. (Since neither Dr. Docter nor Mrs. Jones gives all the names and dates, this might be the place to add, for the record, the specifics of Cheney's marriages. The first, October 2, 1929, was to Elizabeth Schuler. They separated in 1935 and were divorced in 1936. The second was on May 3, 1941, to Elnora McClellan. She was living when this account was taped but died on September 23, 1979.)

There is a temptation in writing a preface to this work to sign it "Will Cheney" or "Lawrence Clark Powell" or with the name of some other real or invented person connected with the Cheney saga. Both these temptations will be resisted. As far as extensive quotations go, I hope that anyone who reads this work will do so in conjunction with other titles by or about this fascinating person and so find the choice comments for himself.

Cheney is said to be shy and hard to know. It is true that he is not the gregarious, back-slapping kind and is apt to be withdrawn when in a lively social gathering; but on a one-to-one (or -two) basis he is readily communicative and a delightful companion. For many years I have been a dedicated collector of Cheney imprints and personal contacts. Not being typographically educated, I do not feel competent to try to evaluate

his standing and influence in the local printing scene. Indeed, I suppose he has not exerted much influence--not that he would consciously try to do so. When not employed by others he has had a one-man shop, so has had no apprentices or younger people working for him. Except that many people are now producing miniature books, no one seems to have tried to imitate Will's typographic style.⁴

But Will Cheney is far from insignificant in the history of Southern California fine printing. As this book shows, he has had extensive contact with many of the key figures, who--even if they found that they could not work with him readily--enjoyed his company and his letters and his writings about language and typography. These have been similarly enjoyed by a host of others, including many librarians, booksellers, educators, and so on. Cheney's relations with and opinions of other printers are already pretty well documented. The present text covers a relationship not otherwise well known, that with Glen and Muir Dawson of Dawson's Book Shop. Since World War II Glen has been, no doubt, the principal patron in commissioning work by Cheney, especially miniatures. Herein one will find data covering the first contacts between the two on through the conditions under which recent works have been handled by them. This

4. That it is not "inimitable" is shown by the invitation to the Clark Library exhibit of December, 1981, printed by Vance Gerry and Patrick Reagh. Cheney points out that this piece also shows the influence of Saul Marks.

adds flesh to the story of the book shop as well as to that of the printer.

Anyone at all familiar with the corpus of Cheney writings will know of him as an artist, of his whimsical drawings. This is an aspect of him hardly touched on elsewhere; in these interviews one will find comment by him on his drawing, especially his unsuccessful attempt at producing a comic strip.

In school--as narrated in this text--Will invented a language, geography, and culture for a nation of trolls: he eventually printed an essay about them. No doubt he felt at home in Trolland, because he seems to be a troll or pixie himself. His interviewer once in conversation referred to him as "that six-foot leprechaun." This facet of Cheney is certainly one of the reasons why so many people enjoy him and his writings. Whether or not it comes from being a citizen of Trolland, Cheney certainly marches to his own drumbeat. As Lawrence Clark Powell says, "in a lockstep society which worships size, Will Cheney is gloriously out of step."⁵ Forget your own pace and enjoy a walk with Will Cheney in the pages that follow.

--Edwin H. Carpenter, January 1982

5. Lawrence Clark Powell, Southwest BroadSides (Los Angeles, 1958), p. 1.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER: Richard F. Docter, freelance consultant to the Oral History Program, UCLA. B.A., UCSB; Ph.D., psychology, Stanford. Professor of psychology, California State University, Northridge; hobby printer and member of the Rounce and Coffin Club.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Cheney's West Los Angeles apartment.

Dates: January 15, 30, 31, February 11, 1975.

Time of day, length of sessions, and total number of recording hours: Each of three midafternoon sessions lasted about two hours. Four hours of conversation were recorded.

Persons present during interview: Docter, Cheney, and Mrs. Cheney.

CONDUCT OF THE INTERVIEW:

Docter writes:

I have known Will Cheney as a fellow hobby printer since 1959, when I joined the Rounce and Coffin Club. I knew of his work through examples shown to me by Muir Dawson, who is also a hobby printer and a longtime friend of Cheney. I visited Cheney's shop when it was located near Jake Zeitlin's bookstore in West Hollywood, and I also called upon him many times when he had his shop at the Clark library, out in the carriage house.

When Cheney moved his printing activities from the Clark Library to his small apartment, it was necessary for him to sell some of his type, his ten-by-fifteen Chandler and Price press, his paper cutter, and various type cabinets. I bought all of this from him and moved it to my garage/print shop in Northridge.

Will Cheney is an extremely shy and withdrawn person, who is ill at ease in social situations. I may have had an unusual advantage in conducting this interview, because I knew him moderately

well and he seemed to enjoy talking with me over the years. I attempted to set a conversational tone for the interview sessions and to encourage Cheney to roam about wherever his thoughts might take him. From time to time I returned to a rough chronological outline just to help get as much coverage within the history as possible, but I tried not to force him to stick with my agenda.

I knew Cheney had been born in Los Angeles and that he had come from a prominent family, so I asked many questions that might throw a bit of light on what it was like to grow up here around the turn of the century.

This oral history surely contains what many would consider a great deal of trivial and irrelevant detail; Cheney would love to be remembered just that way, for he is not only a uniquely talented and highly regarded hobby printer but also a master of trivia and irrelevant detail.

William Cheney is best known for his miniature books and for his patience in hand-setting extensive text in 4-point type.

EDITING:

Editing was done by Deborah Young, assistant editor, Oral History Program. She checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings and edited for punctuation, paragraphing, correct spelling, and verification of proper nouns. The final manuscript remains in the same order as the original taped material. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Cheney reviewed the edited transcript and answered the editor's queries.

Edwin H. Carpenter, bibliographer and author of A Natural History of the Typestickers of Los Angeles, Compiled from the Letters of Wm. H. Cheney by Edwin H. Carpenter, wrote the introduction. (He also spotted some typographical and factual errors in the finished manuscript, which were subsequently corrected.)

Other front matter and the index were prepared by Oral History Program staff.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

JANUARY 15, 1975

DOCTER: Maybe we could begin by asking just a couple of very general things. Maybe you could tell us some obvious facts, like your birth date, and where you were born, and perhaps whether you have any brothers and sisters or not, or--just a little bit of official family background pertaining to yourself.

CHENEY: I was born in Los Angeles in November 1907. Had a brother, but he died when I was still a little child.

DOCTER: I see. What date was it in November? Do you mind?

CHENEY: Twenty-eighth.

DOCTER: Twenty-eighth of November.

CHENEY: Yes. I'm a Sagittarius.

DOCTER: Nineteen. . . ?

CHENEY: . . . seven.

DOCTER: . . . seven. I see. And would you have been born at home, as many people were at that time?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: And where did you live?

CHENEY: At 1532 Rockwood Street.

DOCTER: Rockwood.

CHENEY: Yes, it's one block north of Beverly Boulevard and parallel to it, runs from Glendale Boulevard to Union Avenue.

DOCTER: And did you live there for very long? Was this your

childhood residence?

CHENEY: For eight years.

DOCTER: What kind of a house was it?

CHENEY: Redwood, two-story, frame redwood house built with those square nails, hammered nails. It was built back in the 1870s, thereabouts.

DOCTER: And could you tell us, perhaps, as you mentioned when we talked once before, just a little about how the Cheney's happened to come to California?

CHENEY: Oh, Lord, let's see. Well, first, my grandfather was a Methodist missionary. He came around the Horn to Austin, Nevada, back in '69; and then he went back to Massachusetts and was a minister for a year or two back there, married. And my father was born in Boston. And they came out to California again--my father was about a year old--settled in Plumas County, where my grandfather went into the law and became a judge, the county judge at Plumas County.

DOCTER: And then later, I think you said, he came down . . .

CHENEY: He was state senator from Plumas County in Sacramento and then came to Los Angeles in '83.

DOCTER: In 1883?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Was there any particular event that brought him here, that you would know of?

CHENEY: I don't know. Probably it looked like more opportunity down here.

DOCTER: Well, that was the time of the land boom, wasn't it, in Los Angeles?

CHENEY: In the eighties, yes.

DOCTER: And then he remained here, did he, the rest of his life?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Let's see. And where was--I think you said where your father was born, but would you say it again, for me?

CHENEY: Oh, he was born in Boston.

DOCTER: Boston. And then. . . ?

CHENEY: And didn't live there more than a year or two.

DOCTER: Right, right, right. So he really grew up here in California.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: For all practical purposes. What school did you attend as an elementary school child?

CHENEY: Union Avenue School. It was at Union and Beverly, or First Street, as it was at that time. Union Avenue--went through the eighth grade, as we used to do in those days--and to L.A. High.

DOCTER: Now, which L.A. High was that? Was that the one. . . ?

CHENEY: It was the Los Angeles High School. Oh, the one on Rimpau--Olympic and Rimpau, now--but it's the only L.A. High.

DOCTER: Was it in the location of the present L.A. High?

CHENEY: Yes. I think that was built there about 1919 or something like that.

DOCTER: The one they've just torn down, last year, or a year or two ago. But you didn't attend--did you attend that school? The one. . . ?

CHENEY: Yes, that one, not the one down on Fort Moore Hill.

DOCTER: Right. The Fort Moore Hill location, I guess, would have been the first L.A. High location, is that correct? And then they moved up to Olympic?

CHENEY: Yes, down in there. It wasn't that--it wasn't the building that was down there at that time; the old wooden building was the first one. I think 1873, somewhere along in there, it was built. And the high school was on one floor, and the grade school on the other floor of the old wooden building, which was down there until, oh, twelve or fifteen years ago, when they tore it down.

DOCTER: Yes, yes.

CHENEY: That was the original high school.

DOCTER: Now, when you think about your elementary school experience, what was that school like? I suppose it's long been torn down.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: What would that school have looked like?

CHENEY: It was a wooden building, and it wasn't torn down;

it burned down, in the mid-forties. It was one of the last old frame school buildings left in the city.

DOCTER: I see. Any idea when it would have been constructed, roughly?

CHENEY: No. Sometime before the turn of the century.

DOCTER: I see, I see. And what would the environment in the school be like? What were the rooms like? Do you recall?

CHENEY: Just large square rooms, as I recall. Hold about thirty or thirty-five pupils, I guess.

DOCTER: Would those pupils all have been Caucasians, or would there have been any Mexican-American youngsters, or. . . ?

CHENEY: There were a few Mexican-Americans, and there were a number of blacks in that district. It was a mixed district, but it wasn't a ghetto district. There were some very well-to-do people in that area and some very poor people.

DOCTER: That was near Beverly and Union.

CHENEY: Yes, it's Beverly now; it was First Street in those days.

DOCTER: Well, that is very much downtown, isn't it? That's just a . . .

CHENEY: It is now. It was way out west in those days.

DOCTER: Was it? A residential area?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Because, I think, well, Union would only be perhaps about a mile or so from Figueroa. Am I right?

CHENEY: It's about that, yes. You know where Alvarado is, where the St. Vincent's Hospital is. It's, oh, it would be four or five blocks east of that.

DOCTER: Right. At that time, was Westlake Park a city park?

CHENEY: Yes, it was.

DOCTER: I guess they changed the name.

CHENEY: They changed it, oh, I guess, in 1950 or thereabouts.

DOCTER: After the war.

CHENEY: But it was always, to the old-timers, it's still Westlake Park.

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: And a time when my father was a boy and they lived on Bunker Hill, which was about as far west as the town went, he used to ride on horseback out to West Pond.

DOCTER: West Pond?

CHENEY: Yes. In the spring and early summer there was a pond there.

DOCTER: I see, I see. Now, you mentioned living on Bunker Hill.

CHENEY: I didn't.

DOCTER: Oh, your dad did.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: I see, I see. Well, let's track through where you moved, then. After you were eight, where did your residence change to?

CHENEY: Well, let's see, when my grandmother died, why, we went to live with my grandfather, and that was on 1913 Ocean View Avenue (which is now Third Street--Third and Bonnie Brae).

DOCTER: I see, I see. And did you remain there several years?

CHENEY: Yes. Up through high school.

DOCTER: I see. And were there any important ways in which that neighborhood was different from your earlier one? Did they also have, for example, a few blacks, a few Mexican-American youngsters?

CHENEY: Not right down in there, no. It was getting closer to--it was rather Westlake at that time. Westlake Avenue, between Sixth and Ocean View, was a very elegant street with large houses, and it was close to that. It was more of a fashionable district, I was going to say.

DOCTER: Was the area around Adams--down there around Adams and Figueroa--had that been developed into the mansions at that time?

CHENEY: Oh, yes, that was the West Adams district at that time. Well, even where Clark lived--I think that building dates back to about 1900 or so.

DOCTER: Oh, is that right?

CHENEY: And of course the older part down by Chester Place, where the Dohenys lived, that was older still.

DOCTER: I see. Now, in terms of the wealthiest districts, that was surely one of the early ones, I guess, after Bunker Hill.

CHENEY: Oh, yes. Yes, Bunker Hill--oh, after the turn of the century--had begun to decline, although some old families still lived there.

DOCTER: That early?

CHENEY: Well, it was no longer a fashionable district to move into. But, still, some of the older families lived on, I suppose, up till World War I or thereabouts.

DOCTER: I see. But in your childhood, was it still a district that was well kept up and attractive?

CHENEY: Yes, there were some fine houses up there.

DOCTER: In terms of the movement of the city, what areas seemed to develop in terms of being homes of the upper class and the wealthiest citizens, after the West Adams area?

CHENEY: Well, I don't know. Of course this district, along Fourth and Fifth Street, coming out to Muirfield, and Plymouth and Windsor and along in there, was quite a fashionable district and still is. And then there were these, oh, private sort of parklike areas like Fremont

Place (between Olympic and Wilshire at Rossmore), and-- out near Adams was Berkeley Square and Chester Place; this Fremont Place was off Olympic. Such places were considered elegant districts.

DOCTOR: I see, I see. When you were growing up, what kinds of things would the kids be doing just for fun? What did they like to do? Was it different from today?

CHENEY: Well, almost every corner had an empty lot on it, and we played sort of freestyle football or work-up baseball in the empty lots. And then you could play out in the street. There'd be a car about once every half-hour or so would come along. That's the earlier times, up until World War I. Cars became a little more common after that. And we'd play in the streets. Informal games.

DOCTOR: I see. I think the idea of work-up baseball is to work up to be at bat, isn't it?

CHENEY: Yes, and then when you're out, why, you're out in field.

DOCTOR: I see, You have to work your way in. I see.

CHENEY: Well, that's the commonest game when I was a kid. Formal baseball--some of it went on in the playgrounds, but not very much.

DOCTOR: I see, I see. When you left high school, did you go to work directly, or did you go on to any further schooling?

CHENEY: I went to SC [University of Southern California] for

about two and one-half years.

DOCTER: Were you concerned with any particular area of study?

CHENEY: No, I didn't know what I wanted to do. Study. I was mainly interested in languages. Oh, I thought I was going to major in English, but I hadn't anything definite in mind. And after about two and one-half years, I decided I wasn't getting anywhere, so I quit and got married. Got a job in Dawson's Book Shop.

DOCTER: Oh, is that right? Was that your first full-time job?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: And did you know Mr. Dawson from the years before?

CHENEY: No, I saw an ad in the paper to apply in your own handwriting for a job in the bookstore, so that's what I did. I got a phone call, and they asked me to come down to interview me.. And he gave me a job as a shipping clerk.

DOCTER: What kind of pay did he offer you to start with?

CHENEY: Well, it was good enough for then. When was that, 1929? Twenty-five a week. It wasn't bad in those days.

DOCTER: That was 1929?

CHENEY: Yes, the fall of '29.

DOCTER: I see. Now, I guess Glen would have been a boy. Was he working in the store by then?

CHENEY: No, he was a boy. He was in high school. And

Muir was a little--Muir and Fern, June, were just little tads.

DOCTER: Too young to be in the store much. Well, what was Mr. Dawson like? What was his name?

CHENEY: Ernest.

DOCTER: Ernest, yes.

CHENEY: He looked more like Muir than Glen, looked a good deal like Muir. Glen takes more after his mother, I think.

DOCTER: Well, what was he like personally?

CHENEY: Oh, he was a very pleasant person. He was a very good businessman.

DOCTER: In what way? Do you mean just in terms of making money, or in other ways?

CHENEY: Well, it was making money, and handling his customers, and so forth. He was an agreeable person.

DOCTER: Good personality for a retail business. I didn't realize that you had worked there. How long was it until you took on more responsibilities in selling?

CHENEY: Well, that wasn't a very formal arrangement. Whenever it was needed up front, I would be up front, or when they needed window decorating, I'd do that, and handle the shipping.

DOCTER: Well, where was the store at the time that you went to work?

CHENEY: It was on Grand Avenue, and Wilshire didn't come through at that time. Let's see, this was in '29, so it was along about '31 or '32 that Wilshire was brought through to Grand.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: And then they put that painting on the side of the building.

DOCTER: With the books.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Yes. It's a famous painting now. Well, Mr. Dawson had been one of the prime movers, I think, in the early days of the Sierra Club. Do you remember? Wasn't he quite avidly interested in mountaineering and the environment?

CHENEY: Yes. Two or three times a year he'd be off on a Sierra Club hike. He'd go for several days or a week or two.

DOCTER: Then I suppose Glen's great interest and Muir's interest in mountaineering came from some of these early experiences, perhaps.

CHENEY: I suppose so.

DOCTER: In the time that you knew Glen, had he been doing any mountain climbing at that time?

CHENEY: Well, I suppose he'd been along on Sierra Club trips; I don't know. I just saw him every now and then. He'd come in after school, or on a Saturday.

DOCTER: He wasn't a regular worker.

CHENEY: Oh, no. He was still in high school at the time I was there. I was there till the fall of '32, and he was still in high school. Of course, Muir was still just a boy, a small boy.

DOCTER: Is it true that Ernest Dawson's own political beliefs were quite different from his sons'? Possibly?

CHENEY: Well, I think they changed. He was a very strong conservative at the time I was there. At the time of the '32 election, he said if the Republicans didn't get in, why, there'd be no more business; we (we, meaning respectable people in general) might as well just give up. And then after that, after I left there, why, he changed. He seems to have swung to the left. I haven't followed his career very well. But he was a very staunch conservative at the time that I was there.

DOCTER: Was he regarded that early as one of the leading booksellers in Southern California? Or were there more prominent bookstores?

CHENEY: No, I think he was considered the dean of Los Angeles booksellers. Well, they're the oldest one. One of the most respected was Parker--C.C. Parker. And I think he dated back the earliest of any existing at that time. But I think Dawson was the most prominent when I started first, that is, in that kind of rare books and

antiquarian books.

DOCTER: Can you recall any particular incidents or anecdotes or stories about Ernest Dawson that particularly stand out in your mind?

CHENEY: No, I don't think--I wouldn't be able to think of anything that stands out.

DOCTER: Well, let me ask what happened in terms of your own career, then, after you left SC and went to work for Ernest Dawson. In '32--I guess a little before that--you had gotten married, or was it about that time?

CHENEY: Well, I was married within about a month after I started work at Dawson's.

DOCTER: Oh, I see.

CHENEY: Along in the fall of '29.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: October 29.

DOCTER: I see. Do you mind if I ask where you met Mrs. Cheney?

CHENEY: Well, this was a different Mrs. Cheney. The first one I met in high school. She was in Miss Gunning's English class.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: Many old-time Angelenos remember Miss Gunning. For instance, Mrs. Davis out at the Clark will remember Miss Gunning.

DOCTER: Is that right? Edna Davis.

CHENEY: Anyone that went to L.A. High School [will remember] Miss Gunning and Miss Johnson. Anyway, I met her in high school.

DOCTER: I see. I see. Well, then, in '32, did you go into a different job or back to school or what?

CHENEY: No, I didn't go anywhere. I ran into Stricker and helped him set type. In fact, I was introduced to him by Gay Beaman. A.G. Beaman. I'm sure you've heard of him.

DOCTER: Yes, I have. But let's identify Stricker. What was his full name?

CHENEY: Thomas Perry Stricker.

DOCTER: Yes. And maybe you could say just a word or two about who he was, for the record, here.

CHENEY: Well, I don't know who he was. He lived on Carondelet Street, and had a Poco proof press, or, no, it was a Vandercook proof press that he used to print on. And he came from Minneapolis or somewhere up in there. But, otherwise, I don't know just who he was. He was an eccentric and a very fine printer.

DOCTER: Was he doing commercial work? Was he making money printing?

CHENEY: Well, he made some money. He was rather erratic. He wasn't a good businessman. He made some money printing. He printed things for himself, and by the time I started

with him, he was printing The Town Pump, which was written by Charley Grapewin, the actor. And he was paid something for that. I don't know whether he sold any copies or not, but Grapewin reimbursed him. I got six dollars out of it--for my work in throwing type and doing the title page--and the use of Stricker's type and press to print a thing of my own.

DOCTER: I see. Was that your first experience with printing?

CHENEY: Yes, except for when I was a kid, I had a little bit of a handpress.

DOCTER: Well, we'll come back to the handpress matters just a little bit later, but let me continue on this family background just so we can do a pretty thorough job here. Were there any other friends that you had in childhood or in college or at Dawson's? Any other close friends who are particularly memorable at all?

CHENEY: Well, I don't know whether they're memorable, but in L.A. High at that time, there were people who have since become more or less prominent, classmates of mine, and so forth, like--oh, who was Nixon's press secretary? his campaign manager? Murray Chotiner.

DOCTER: Murray Chotiner.

CHENEY: He was a classmate of mine. The Chotiners owned the theater chain along Vermont. The "Chotiners Ravenna"

and the "Chotiners Parisian" and . . .

DOCTER: Is that so?

CHENEY: And one or two other theaters.

DOCTER: Motion picture?

CHENEY: Yes. There were movie houses, as we called them-- in every district there was a movie house in those days.

DOCTER: I see. Well, what was Chotiner like?

CHENEY: He was just a boy, a high school boy. Let's see. Harold Grayson, that became the bandleader later, I believe--he was a classmate of mine. And let's see, Leslie Goddard. I knew him better than those others. He was connected with the superior court. I don't know whether he was a judge or not. He was a court commissioner. And Marvin Freeman, is, I think, a prominent lawyer in town; he was a classmate. Norman Tyer. His people have turned out to be of various political persuasions. But they were all just schoolboys in those days.

DOCTER: Right. Right.

CHENEY: Those are the only ones I can think of, offhand. And my friend Kirby Etter, who later became the editor of the Fortnightly Intruder, which he and I published. And during the war he went into government service in the Pakistani embassy. Died over there back in, oh, 1953 or so.

DOCTER: Were the economic ups and downs that Los Angeles suffered, say, from 1900 on--did these affect your family

much? Was your family influenced by these swings in the economy?

CHENEY: Oh, yes. My father took to the law because his father had been a lawyer and a judge; but he wasn't a person who could meet anyone, and he just sat in his law office and read Plato. I don't follow him in that--I'd rather read Aristotle. But, anyway, he never made any money in the law, and my grandfather left him, oh, quite a bit of money in government bonds when he died, and told him, "Just keep those bonds, and you'll always be able to live." My father, of course (government bonds were only paying 2 percent, or 3 percent, or something) sold these and bought building bonds, office buildings in Los Angeles and San Francisco. And, of course, in the Depression those went bankrupt.

DOCTER: They did?

CHENEY: Yes. These office buildings were standing empty. And those paid 5 or 6 percent, which was a very good return in those days. So, he sold all his government bonds and put his fortune into building bonds and, of course, lost it all in the Depression.

DOCTER: Outright? Just lost the whole thing?

CHENEY: Well, they just defaulted. So that was--the family fortune went then.

DOCTER: My goodness. He was not really a practicing

attorney. He didn't go out and seek . . .

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Oh, he was?

CHENEY: Well, he had an office with his partner, in an office, and he was listed as an attorney. But he avoided jobs as much as possible.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: He didn't like to appear in court or take anything like divorce cases, anything like that. It was all too unpleasant for him.

DOCTER: Well, was he quite a literary figure? I mean, was he interested in books and history and literature most?

CHENEY: Yes, he liked to read. He'd written--had to, as a youth. He tried to write somewhat and then gave that up. But he liked to read.

DOCTER: Could you say just a word or two about your mother?

CHENEY: Well, she came from Nebraska--a farm between Hastings and Trumbull, Nebraska. Their family settled in around Tustin, and she went out to work and was a secretary --I suppose you'd call them secretaries--in my grandfather's office. That's where my father met her.

DOCTER: Was she as interested in literature as your father, or . . .

CHENEY: Oh, she was interested in it. She didn't have the same background; she came from a farm. But when she was a

farm girl, she had got hold of a copy of Tennyson's Idylls of the King. She used to read that. She says she climbed in an apple tree, she used to tell me, and read that until her parents would find her, make her come down and go out and milk the cows. She apparently had an interest in literature.

DOCTER: Were your parents active in encouraging you to take an interest in books and literature and languages? Or is this something that you just found on your own?

CHENEY: Well, they more or less let me alone. I think my grandfather was more interested. At L.A. High at that time they had four years of Latin, three years of Greek, and he insisted that I take Greek, because he himself had been a Greek scholar. My parents weren't particularly enthusiastic about that, but my grandfather dominated the family.

DOCTER: He did?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Was he personally a forceful man? What was he like as a person?

CHENEY: Well, he was very different from my father. He was more extroverted, and he liked to give speeches--Fourth of July orations, and that sort of thing--back in the nineties and thereabouts, and he was always called on to give speeches. He liked to do that. He liked to meet people. But his fortune, mainly, was just an accident.

For a legal fee of \$300, which old Nate Brooks couldn't pay, who owned most of the land--he just claimed and squatted on most the land around Laguna Beach--for a legal fee of \$300 Nate Brooks gave my grandfather nine oceanfront lots down at Laguna, the first point south of town there. The Yoch Hotel, and that was known as Cheney Point. My grandfather built the first house out on the coast along there.

DOCTER: In lieu of a \$300 legal fee.

CHENEY: Yes. It was just land; the Brooks family picked up all the land from about where Aliso Creek is, on north of nearly Balboa at that time. They had a sort of tenuous ownership of it.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: And the place down on Eleventh and Hill--he got that for a legal debt, a legal fee of \$4,000 in 1890, and sold it in 1913 for \$90,000. That was the source of his . . .

DOCTER: Well, now, Eleventh and Hill. Let's see, Figueroa and Hill, it was farther downtown.

CHENEY: Well, I think that's where the Mayan Theatre is.

DOCTER: Oh, yes.

CHENEY: At any rate, it was the same piece of land that the Mayan Theatre is on. I think that's Eleventh and Hill.

DOCTER: I see. I see. Now, just for reference points here: someone owed him roughly \$4,000 and made a deal to

give him title to the property . . .

CHENEY: Yes, that was in 1890.

DOCTOR: ... in lieu of the fee. And then he was able to sell it for \$90,000.

CHENEY: Yes, well, by 1913, it was worth a bit more.

DOCTOR: He held it for twenty-three years.

CHENEY: Yes, well, they lived there.

DOCTOR: Oh, they had a house there.

CHENEY: Yes, they had a house there. I have some pictures of those things if you want to see it later. Can't record pictures very well.

DOCTOR: Right. In 1913, that certainly would have been a fortune, wouldn't it? Ninety-thousand dollars would have been regarded as a huge sum, because I suppose the average person was making only two or three thousand, at the most, in wages, perhaps less, at that time. And I guess that there would not--am I correct?--have been the same taxation at that time?

CHENEY: Probably not. It was capital gains; I suppose it wasn't taxed at all. I don't know, but I would assume that it was not taxed at all. And, of course, then he bought this property in 1913--Ocean View Avenue--and spent some of it on that.

DOCTOR: Ocean View?

CHENEY: Yes. Now, that's Third Street now. There is an Ocean View Avenue that runs off at an angle from west of

Alvarado, but at that time Ocean View Avenue was all that part of Third Street along Bonnie Brae to Alvarado.

DOCTER: Still, what we would think of as quite a ways downtown now.

CHENEY: It was out west in those days. Furthermore, you could see the ocean from there in those days.

DOCTER: At Santa Monica, or the other way? No, no, you'd have to see . . .

CHENEY: You could look west, I suppose a little south or east of Santa Monica.

DOCTER: You could see the ocean? Almost every day?

CHENEY: No, but on clear days. Before we had smog we used to have haze, but on clear days we . . .

DOCTER: Ocean View Avenue really meant it. They had enough elevation and so on to see the ocean. Those were the old days.

CHENEY: Along about Alvarado and Ocean View, that's right where St. Vincent's Hospital is now, that was on a point of land there, sloped down in every direction from there, and you could look off and to see the ocean on a clear day.

DOCTER: Did he simply buy lots along Ocean View Avenue, or did he develop them?

CHENEY: No, there was already a house there.

DOCTER: Oh, I see. But he just bought a residence. It wasn't his intention to be a real estate investor.

CHENEY: Oh, no.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: No, he just wanted a place to live.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: Just fixed it up himself and built onto it and bought a pipe organ. He built on an annex, two-story annex to build on, so that the pipe organ could stand up in it.

DOCTER: Is that right?

CHENEY: And built a balcony out from the bedroom with a floor above, so's you could stand there and look down on the pipe organ.

DOCTER: Is that so? Did he play it?

CHENEY: Yes, he used to play it. He was self-taught, but he was able to play pretty well.

DOCTER: Do you have any idea whatever became of that organ?

CHENEY: Yes. I sold it back to the Este Organ Company.

The same man who'd installed it, in 1913 or '14, dismantled it in 1939, and he sold it to someone in Alhambra. I don't know just who it was, but it was someone lived in Alhambra, he told me. I got \$250 for it.

DOCTER: It would be a real treasure today, wouldn't it?

The pipe organ collectors would probably have a hard time finding one like it.

CHENEY: It was a real pipe organ. Had the brass pipes-- at least they were brass-surfaced. I don't know--they may

have been iron.

DOCTER: Right. In what year, if you don't mind my asking, did you marry Mrs. Cheney, the Mrs. Cheney that I know?

CHENEY: This one?

DOCTER: Sure.

CHENEY: In 1941. May 3, 1941, down in Yuma.

DOCTER: And has Mrs. Cheney been interested at all in printing activities, or did she know about your work in-- I imagine she knew that you were....

CHENEY: Well, she knew about it. She knew Stricker, too. Stricker was living in this--by that time, I had this place. By the way, the Laguna property accounts for this place. I got this . . .

DOCTER: ... bought this apartment building.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: I see. And Stricker was living nearby?

CHENEY: Well, he was living here, there, and everywhere. He was living over in my district, over near Echo Park, at that time, and so we moved Stricker into this lower middle center apartment, and he was to manage the building.

DOCTER: Oh, is that so?

CHENEY: Yes. And he got his rent for managing the place, but it didn't work out very well.

DOCTER: That was in 1941.

CHENEY: In 1940, thereabouts.

DOCTER: In '40, '41.

CHENEY: Yes. I got this place in, oh, the end of '39, and Stricker was in here in the 1940s.

DOCTER: Right. Now the address here is 942, is it?

CHENEY: That's this particular unit. They're 934 to 944, is the . . .

DOCTER: Alandele. And were you the first owner of this particular building?

CHENEY: Yes. I took it from the developer. The fellow that developed the whole street, a man named [Herman H.] Trott. And the way this street got it's peculiar name, Alandele (which nobody can spell)--his nephew and niece were named Alan and Adele.

DOCTER: Alan and...?

CHENEY: Adele.

DOCTER: Adele. [laughter]

CHENEY: So this street is called Alandele.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: And I bought the property from him. He was the builder.

DOCTER: And at that time, just before World War II, was there lots of vacant property in this area? Or was it pretty well filled in by then?

CHENEY: Well, this street wasn't very well filled in. There were several empty lots on this street. Some of the

streets around here were built up, had been built up in the thirties.

DOCTER: Now, could we turn to Stricker for just a minute and talk a little bit about him? As I understand, he was actually printing in his own home. He wasn't running a commercial print shop.

CHENEY: No, he was printing in--his bedroom and pressroom were the same room, and he would take any job that he could handle. He printed for money; he was commercial in that sense.

DOCTER: Now, there were many, many, many print shops in different neighborhoods at that time in Los Angeles, weren't there? Just as there are many today, even though they've changed. Was it through his friends that he would get printing assignments, and how could he attract business?

CHENEY: Oh, by word of mouth. Gay Beaman was, of course, quite a catalyst in finding work for him, and then for me, later, with his associations. But Stricker, at that time, had done work for [Jake] Zeitlin, I believe, and did work for Beaman; and they found customers for him.

DOCTER: No, his work would have been things like, perhaps, covers of catalogs and fliers. They wouldn't be books, I don't imagine, would they?

CHENEY: Well, yes, he had just done a book for himself. Laurence Sterne--oh, I forget the name of the thing. It's

not Sterne's Sermons, but it was something or other by Sterne. And just before that, he completed Nets Upon the Morning, by a Bunker Hill poet named Dee Verlaine (the pen name of Basil DeVaelen). He was a character around Los Angeles in those days. That was a book. And then, at the time I first met him, he was working on Grapewin's book, The Town Pump.

DOCTER: I see. How much equipment did he have in his--was it a house or an apartment?

CHENEY: He lived in one or two rooms of a dwelling house, and the owner lived in the rest of the house.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: He had this proof press and about two stands of type cases.

DOCTER: Did he have a substantial quantity of some fonts?

CHENEY: Yes, the font he had--the Garamond was his main face, and he also had Nicholas Cochin. He did this Nets Upon the Morning with Nicholas Cochin. And he had, oh, I suppose, a hundred-pound font or so of fourteen-point Garamond, which is what The Town Pump was done in.

DOCTER: Yes. How had Stricker gotten started printing, do you know?

CHENEY: I don't know. I think he'd started probably working in job shops or something, before he came West. I don't know whether it was in Minneapolis, or--it was somewhere

back in there, around the [Great] Lakes, that he came from.

DOCTER: You had had some introduction to printing before you ever met him, however. You mentioned a small hand-press.

CHENEY: Yes, well, it was just as a child, I had that; I didn't really know anything. Set a little type, tried to print cards, and that sort of thing, when I was about, oh, eleven, twelve years old.

DOCTER: [It was] something that had been given to you, but it wasn't because you had taken printing in school.

CHENEY: Oh, no, it was--I think it was given to me by my parents, I believe. I had it set up out in the shed, printed on it for a while.

DOCTER: How large a press was it?

CHENEY: Oh, it was just a little tiny card press. Probably about four-by-six, or something like that.

DOCTER: I see. And this did not lead to any serious printing efforts at that time, I take it.

CHENEY: No, it didn't. I abandoned it, and when I told Stricker about it, that interested him. He said that I would make a good apprentice, because I knew just a little bit but not too much. I wouldn't have anything to unlearn.

DOCTER: Did Stricker teach you how to set type? Your first actual composition, then, would have been with him.

Well, how did he start you? What did he. . . ?

CHENEY: Started me with throwing type. That's the way they usually start.

DOCTER: Gave you a job. . . .

CHENEY: Showed me how to pick up a line and spell off the word, you know, and distribute. And, after a while, he let me set some of it.

DOCTER: Right. Now, this may sound like a stupid question, but did Stricker like to distribute type holding it inverted, as some do? Or did he have any favorite way of having type quickly thrown back into a case?

CHENEY: Well, everybody--I think every old-time printer holds it inverted. You read from left to right.

DOCTER: Sort of holding it between the thumb and the third finger.

CHENEY: Yes, but he held it in a way that, I believe, DeVinne shows--holding it down in your hand. But I've never been able to do that. I used to hold it one line at a time, in those days, till I worked at the Artesia News, after the war, and the boss down there held it up on a bridge on this finger and between these two fingers; you can hold quite a stack that way. And I learned to hold it that way and do it that way. But as for this holding it in the palm of the hand, I've never been able.

DOCTER: You hold several lines in the palm?

CHENEY: Well, you can hold a whole paragraph in . . .

DOCTER: In a palm?

CHENEY: . . . in a lift of type. That is, it's set right in here. I think there's probably an illustration in DeVinne showing how that's done, but I've never been able to do it. The type goes in, but it won't stay on its feet. The way that the editor of the Artesia News would hold it was on this finger, holding it between these two fingers.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: And you can take lines up as long as thirty picas or so. If you get over that, then you have to hold it against your thumb, on these fingers, and you don't take more than one line or so at a time. But you can hold, if you have long fingers, up to about thirty picas; and the longer the lines, the fewer you take at a time. You won't take more than about five lines of twelve points at thirty picas. You get down to twenty picas, and you can take, oh, fifteen lines or so at a time.

DOCTER: Now, let's say Stricker has a job to be done. Was his approach to get right to work and assign you certain tasks, seeing the job and getting it right on the press? Or was he casual and perhaps a little slow in approaching the work?

CHENEY: His approach when he was confronted with a job was to go out and get a bottle of ale and think about it.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: I didn't do any job work for him except to work on this book.

DOCTER: I see. The Town Pump?

CHENEY: Yes. And then he allowed me to use his press and type when he wasn't using it.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

JANUARY 15, 1975

DOCTER: I think you were saying that your first job was called A Voyage . . .

CHENEY: . . . To Trolland.

DOCTER: To Trolland.

CHENEY: Yes, the Trolls.

DOCTER: All right. And did you simply distribute this to your friends?

CHENEY: Well, the idea was to make money on it. I printed all of 150, I believe, and bound them--just paper covers. And I left some around in bookstores. I left about five of them with Jake Zeitlin, and about a month later he called up and asked me to come down and get them again. And he gave me back four of them. Guess he kept one. And for the rest of them, I sold them to friends or whoever could be made to buy them, and I probably sold a dozen altogether, and then gave away the rest that I'd bound and threw away the flats of those that I didn't get around to binding.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: That was that scheme. And we were always having schemes that way to make money; write something and print it and sell it and make some money. I think we usually lost interest after--I never completely bound any edition.

DOCTER: Now, what year would that have been?

CHENEY: Well, it was '33, summer of '33, was when I did this Voyage to Trolland.

DOCTER: Now, do you ever see this in catalogs today, as the first Cheney item?

CHENEY: Oh, yes, I think it's in this Reynolds catalog-- it's listed in there.

DOCTER: Is it?

CHENEY: And I think Dawson's has had it once or twice in their catalogs.

DOCTER: What's Reynolds asking for it?

CHENEY: I don't know, but those people get more out of one copy of things like that than I'd get out of a whole edition in my time.

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: You want to talk about anything else while I'm trying to find it, here? [looks for Reynolds catalog]

DOCTER: Well, we'll shut this off for just a second.

[tape recorder turned off] All right, we're rolling the tape again, and Mr. Cheney is pointing out that in the catalog just published by Mr. J.E. Reynolds, Bookseller, 16031 Sherman Way, Van Nuys, California, which is a catalog of materials from the personal library of Ward Ritchie, that Will Cheney's first book is offered here at thirty-five dollars. And I think you're probably very

right that often some of these pieces--a single copy--are selling for more than perhaps you derived from the whole edition.

CHENEY: Yes, that would be the case there.

DOCTER: Doesn't that sometimes stir you up a little bit? Doesn't bother you?

CHENEY: No.

DOCTER: Because I guess the projects were, in many ways, a labor of love, regardless of the commercial success or failure.

CHENEY: Yes, well, one started out with great hopes, and it was fun doing it; but usually by the time it came to binding, one had lost interest and was thinking up some other project.

DOCTER: The printing was the thing.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Did you always get a bang out of setting type? Was it always enjoyable?

CHENEY: Yes. I just love type in my hands, putting words into metal. Setting type is much more fascinating to me than printing.

DOCTER: I see. Isn't there a certain excitement to seeing what a form looks like for the first time? Do you get a charge out of that?

CHENEY: Yes, it's usually a disappointment. It looks better in the type than it does when you print it.

DOCTER: [laughter] Very good. Now, after you moved

away from use of Stricker's facilities, did you go to work for another printer? Or how did you earn a living at that time, for example? This would have been in the early thirties, '33 or so.

CHENEY: Yes. Oh, I was living, a little here and a little there. I used to do illustrations for neighborhood newspapers. Every district had its little advertising newspaper, and I did the illustrations and cartoons for them and made a little off that. But also this friend of mine I mentioned, Kirby Etter . . .

DOCTER: Herbie. . . ?

CHENEY: William Kirby Etter. He was always called Kirby to distinguish him from his father, who was the vice-president of the Santa Fe Railway, old "Rawhide" Etter, as he was known in the railroad yards. Anyway, he and I went into partnership and bought a Poco proof press, a very old Poco proof press, and some Caslon Oldstyle type. And the idea was to start a magazine. The magazine, for one reason or another, didn't get started till 1936.

But the first job I had, I believe, was a Zamorano membership list, done for Gay Beaman. I think that's listed in here. And then I had a job from Paul Jordan-Smith (Fryar Yordanus, as he called himself)--Rabelaisian Phancies. That was quite a job. It was, oh, a hundred pages or so. And Stricker was supposed to bind it, but

Stricker bound five or six copies and gave up on it. So it never was completed.

DOCTER: Where was this shop located?

CHENEY: That was where I was living at that time, which was over near where Dodger Stadium is now-- Angeleno Heights, Douglas and Sunset, in that area.

DOCTER: North of the city.

CHENEY: Northern part, yes.

DOCTER: Up above Chinatown?

CHENEY: Well, near to it, but about halfway between Echo Park and Dodger Stadium, in that area.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: Used to call it Angeleno Heights.

DOCTER: Well, isn't that the exact area where there now is a street of historic Victorian homes?

CHENEY: It may be. Is it Kellam Avenue or Edgeware?

DOCTER: Yes, right along in there.

CHENEY: Yes, well, that's Angeleno Heights. That's a very old district there. I lived up in there. I lived on Allison Avenue, which is on the northern slopes of Angeleno Heights.

DOCTER: I see. All right. And at that time, you were earning some money from these printing activities, but not a great deal.

CHENEY: No, not a great deal.

DOCTER: But was it enough to sort of keep yourself going, so that you didn't need any other job?

CHENEY: Yes, well, I did odds and ends, this and that, but you could live on very little in those days in '33 and '34, along in there.

DOCTER: I see. I suppose you could travel around the city on the big Red Cars and the regular streetcars very inexpensively?

CHENEY: Oh, yes. I usually walked.

DOCTER: Did you?

CHENEY: Downtown was just a mile and one-half or so.

DOCTER: And the bookstores and the booksellers would all be. . . ?

CHENEY: They were all along Sixth Street.

DOCTER: Right there.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Was Zeitlin helpful to you personally? You mentioned that he was trying to sell a few copies of the books. Did you meet Zeitlin early in the. . . ?

CHENEY: No, I just met him casually; I didn't meet him to know him very well until later, when he was out near Lafayette Park, oh, near the Otis Art Institute. He had his bookstore along in there somewhere [Carondelet Street]. And Stricker used to see him every few days, and I went over with Stricker. That's the first time I met him to talk to

him.

DOCTER: Would that have been in the early thirties, then?

CHENEY: That was along toward the late thirties.

DOCTER: Late thirties. We're referring to Jake Zeitlin, a well-known Los Angeles antiquarian bookseller. What was Zeitlin like? Was he a friendly guy? Was he distant, or easy to get to know, or. . . ?

CHENEY: Oh, he was friendly.

DOCTER: Did he have time to talk to you?

CHENEY: Oh, yes. Well, he'd take time, because his interest was talking to people.

DOCTER: What was he like personally?

CHENEY: Well, I never knew him too well in those days. I never knew him very well until after he was at the red barn--1950, thereafter. But he was pleasant enough to talk to, the few times I've met him.

DOCTER: Did people think in those earlier years that he would become one of the distinguished booksellers? I think there's no doubt that he has.

CHENEY: Well, I really don't know what they thought.

DOCTER: It wasn't too obvious, perhaps.

CHENEY: Yes. Well, I didn't get around among people enough to know what people were thinking, anyway.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: They may have thought this or that.

DOCTER: I see. Well, just to carry the story forward, did you continue, then, operating a small shop at your home for several years? What was the next step?

CHENEY: The next step was to ship the press and type up to White Salmon, Washington, and go up myself, with the idea of starting a printing plant up there.

DOCTER: Is that so?

CHENEY: That lasted for a month or two, and I came back again. Shipped it all back. Found out they didn't need a printer of my sort up there. White Salmon had a newspaper of its own. What little printing they needed it could handle.

DOCTER: Where is that city?

CHENEY: Well, it's right opposite Hood River, Oregon.

DOCTER: I see. Along the Columbia River?

CHENEY: Yes, the north bank of the Columbia.

DOCTER: What was the attraction? What took you there?

CHENEY: Well, somebody that I knew down here had gone up there and become a schoolteacher in White Salmon. And so I moved up and moved in on his house, set up the press there.

DOCTER: Just to try it out.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Then when you came back, what arrangements did you make? Where did you set up your printing equipment?

CHENEY: I moved back to my parents' home on 1913 West Third Street. Set up the press in my bedroom there.

DOCTER: And this would then have been toward the latter part of the 1930s?

CHENEY: Yes, somewhere in the latter half.

DOCTER: And you continued to operate pretty much in the same way, perhaps doing a little work for newspapers, artwork from time to time? And then what was the next step?

CHENEY: Well, the Fortnightly Intruder came out in '36 and '37. Let's see, then I took a course in mechanical drafting and got a job in the engineering department at Douglas Aircraft.

DOCTER: Is that right?

CHENEY: Started out as a trace and wound up as a layout man, with a title of engineer, although I never did learn what a rivet was or anything like that. But I was made a rivet expert.

DOCTER: Now, was this during the war?

CHENEY: Yes, from about 1941 to 1946.

DOCTER: I see. And which Douglas Aircraft plant was this?

CHENEY: Santa Monica.

DOCTER: I see. Their home base over there, the original. These old buildings that are still there, I guess. And what kinds of drawings would you have worked on? Aircraft?

CHENEY: Yes. I was in the structures department, and I

was supposed to be a rivet expert. I designed the fittings for the integral gas tanks and also the vertical fitting on the wing of the C-74, right where it broke off on the test flight.

DOCTER: Is that true?

CHENEY: Yes. Yes, that was my joint, there, that vertical --they called it ninety vertical, or something like that. It was where the wing came out, and then the dihedral angle started from there; that wing broke off right at that joint where I designed the fittings.

DOCTER: On the test flight?

CHENEY: Yeah, I think it was the test flight. I know that that plane came down, anyway. Its wing broke off.

DOCTER: Is that right? Now, that was a transport of some sort?

CHENEY: C-74, yes.

DOCTER: C-74? Is that a transport that we would recognize at all?

CHENEY: Well, it was a big thing, about the biggest plane at that time. Let's see, DC-7 was what they called it after--C-74 was the army name at that time.

DOCTER: And it became the DC-7?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Isn't that interesting? Well, then, I guess you were, in effect, being patriotic to go to work in a

defense factory.

CHENEY: Well, it was also a chance at a job that would pay something.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: Or that I thought that it was something I could do--mechanical engineering or mechanical drawing. It's not simply the drafting. It's something I could do, so I took a brush-up course in mechanical drafting, applied for a job at Douglas; and they hired anything at that time, especially someone that was old enough that he was probably more or less stable, and also old enough that he probably wouldn't be drafted right away. I was thirty-three or so at that time, and married, so they thought they'd try me out--I'd probably be promising material.

DOCTER: Were you active on any other airplane projects besides what became the DC-7? Were there any other major projects?

CHENEY: Oh, there was one by X-something or other, secret project, the rear-propeller plane that we worked on for a while; I don't think anything came of that project. There are various things that we worked on. They were more or less secret projects, at that time.

DOCTER: I see. Did you enjoy the industrial work? Was it enjoyable, or was it difficult to go to work then?

CHENEY: It wasn't difficult. The only difficulty was

getting up early when we had to get out there at seven o'clock, as we did some of the time, and work nine hours or twelve hours. That got a little tiresome, especially getting up early, because you never seemed to get enough sleep.

DOCTER: Did that put an end to the printing for a while? Or were you still printing?

CHENEY: Oh, for some reason, I sold my press and type and everything else on Pearl Harbor Day, before the news of Pearl Harbor came in. Put an ad in the paper, and someone came around and picked it up. Sold the whole thing: all that Caslon--eleven-point Caslon--which you can't get anymore, and so on. And you used to get it in weight fonts in those days. Instead of just buying job fonts, you'd get a twenty-five or fifty-pound weight font.

DOCTER: Just lower case?

CHENEY: Yes. Well, you could buy the caps, or you could buy just lower case.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: The whole thing, I sold. I was glad to get rid of it; I was tired of it at that time.

DOCTER: What'd you get for it?

CHENEY: Oh, about twenty-five, thirty dollars, something like that.

DOCTER: Is that right? Including the cases?

CHENEY: Yes. Oh, I just--this fellow didn't expect quite so much, probably. I just unloaded it, glad to get rid of it. That was Pearl Harbor Day.

DOCTER: In 1941.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: And then shortly after that you went to work for Douglas?

CHENEY: No, I went to work before that, oh, in the fall of '41. [I was] already at Douglas at that time.

DOCTER: Then, after the war, was Douglas cutting back, or did you want to leave?

CHENEY: Well, both. We were glad to get out of there, but they were laying off at that time.

DOCTER: Probably couldn't begin to support the size of program that they had, I imagine. They probably had thousands of employees, didn't they?

CHENEY: Yes. They had waves of layoffs, and I got into one of the waves along in the spring of '46, somewhere in there.

DOCTER: Did you have any thought of continuing in that kind of industrial design work?

CHENEY: No, it was all right. Drafting was more or less fun, but it wasn't anything that I wanted to stay in.

DOCTER: Just a wartime assignment.

CHENEY: It wasn't the satisfaction that printing is, and setting type.

DOCTER: Right. Well, then, when did you begin to acquire another print shop, and where did you set it up?

CHENEY: Well, first I got a job. I saw an ad for the Artesia News, and they wanted someone to do general work around a country newspaper office, so I went down there and got in on that.

DOCTER: In Artesia?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Well, wasn't it rather difficult to get back and forth?

CHENEY: Yes. It took time. It wasn't difficult, it was time-consuming. I took the Wilshire bus down to downtown, or the Olympic bus, and then walked across to the Pacific Electric building and took the Red Car, Santa Ana car, and got off at Artesia. So I had to start out about five-thirty to six in the morning to make it down there.

DOCTER: What would the fares have been at that time, say, on the bus? Was the bus fare a dime then?

CHENEY: Yes, it was--I don't think it had gone up then--it was about a dime. It was a dime.

DOCTER: That would get you downtown. Then you'd walk to the building at Sixth and Main. The old Pacific Electric building. Now they've changed that building

tremendously inside. They're parking cars in there now. But in the old days, at Sixth and Main, do you recall what the interior of that building was like? The Terminal building?

CHENEY: Well, it was a large room, with popcorn stands and peanut stands and candy stands and so forth, all around it. Magazine vendors--there seemed to be any number of vendors around there. And then the ticket windows toward the center. Then they went off out gates. One gate led out to the cars that came out onto Main Street, and another gate going out the back led to the cars that went out over the viaducts and over the L.A. Record building, where the Record newspaper was printed, down below. You looked down on that building as you went down to, oh, was it Maple Street? Whatever street it landed on.

DOCTER: This was an elevated track out the back, wasn't it?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: I see. So do you recall what you would pay to take the Pacific Electric out to Artesia at that time?

CHENEY: I don't remember what it was. I used to get a ticket book, bought a book of tickets, and I don't know what they cost. It wasn't much compared to fares nowadays. It didn't amount to much.

DOCTER: And then, when you'd get to work at the Artesia News, what would your job be? What did you do there?

CHENEY: Oh, my official job was stereotyper. I melted up the forms, and cast pigs to hang on the linotype, and cast stereotypes, from customers' mats, for their ads. Also did some of their job work, the cards and so forth that they did, and made up the forms--helped make up the forms on the newspaper. They printed the weekly newspaper and also the high school newspaper, which was a weekly.

DOCTER: I see. Was it printed from linotype?

CHENEY: Yes. And the headings were hand-set.

DOCTER: Well, in many ways, it would be typical of a small-town newspaper. What kind of a press would they have had to run, a cylinder press or something?

CHENEY: Yes, a flatbed cylinder.

DOCTER: Kelly, maybe?

CHENEY: I think it was an old--I don't think it was a Kelly. I don't remember the name. It was a single-revolution flatbed.

DOCTER: I see. Almost every county newspaper seemed to have one in the old days, didn't they? Similar kind of an operation.

CHENEY: Yes. A feeder--press feeder--was up on a scaffold, high up in the air, feeding down.

DOCTER: Yes. A sheet at a time.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Now, in terms of getting a job as a printer or a stereotyper, if you had wanted to work right in L.A., knowing the art of composition as you did, and without being part of the typographers' union, could you have gone into commercial shops and gotten a job setting type? Were jobs very tight at that time?

CHENEY: Oh, if they needed somebody in a small shop, and I did after I left the Artesia News. I stayed there about a year. Then I quit because it took so long going and coming.

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: It's one job I didn't get fired from; I quit of my own accord. And I got a job at Muir and Watts down on Union and Pico. Same shop that later Bela Blau was in for a while before he moved on farther east. He wasn't there at that time, but the same shop that Muir and Watts had, same building, later Bela Blau's bindery. And I worked there for about a year.

DOCTER: Commercial print shop?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: And what were your main tasks there?

CHENEY: Well, I was the comp. Of course, you did everything, but I was the compositor. Muir was the owner, but he didn't. . . . By the way, it's the Leo Muir who, when

Kennedy was out here, the time the Democratic convention was held here--I think Leo Muir gave an invocation. They wanted a Mormon, you know, to give an invocation. He was a very old man at that time. It was 1960, and he was already seventy-two, back in 1948 or '49, when I worked at Muir and Watts. Well, he was the owner of the shop, and Watts was the pressman. Watts was an old-time pressman and a Welshman who'd like to sing. He'd feed the press with one hand, and hold a glass of beer in his other hand, and sing the hymns in Welsh, and keep all this going at once. Anyway, he was no typesetter; he had no idea of type composition. He'd put brass and copper spaces at the ends of lines to fill out a line, to justify it, and whatnot. So the composition was turned over to me entirely. They fired the comp that they had before, and they needed a new one. They weren't paying him enough, and he quit. I don't know whether he was fired or quit, but anyway, they weren't paying him enough. But I would work for anything, so they took me on as a comp.

DOCTER: This would have been about 1947.

CHENEY: In '48.

DOCTER: In '48.

CHENEY: You see, in '46 and '47 I was at Artesia. In '48 I worked for Muir and Watts. Then I got my Pilot press along about the end of 1948.

DOCTER: What kind of wages would Muir and Watts have paid in those years? Do you remember? For composition?

CHENEY: Well, the idea was that I was a sort of shareholder in their business.

DOCTER: Oh.

CHENEY: Sometimes I'd get more and sometimes less.

DOCTER: Depending upon the volume of business that they were doing, perhaps.

CHENEY: Yes. I never made more than about twenty-five a week out of it.

DOCTER: Yes. But if they had a very good season, they would pay a little more, and if they were doing poorly, they would cut back a little bit.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Did they have much in the way of type? Was it a well-stocked. . . ?

CHENEY: Well, it was all old worn-out stuff that belonged to the printer that had the place before them--old man Faulkner. I never saw him, but they always talked about him.

DOCTER: Would there have been any faces that would be considered unusually interesting?

CHENEY: No. It was mostly Goudy stuff, Goudy Bold. And they had a lot of old Cheltenham.

DOCTER: But their printing was sort of just straight

job printing? Whatever came in--letterheads, business cards, and booklets--and not so much complete books, though.

CHENEY: No. They did a Pico, West Pico, directory. That was about their biggest job during the year. And I think they did some Mormon printing, for some stake or other. But otherwise it was just local job work.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: For little businesses around Pico.

DOCTER: And what presses did they have?

CHENEY: They had two job presses, a little eight-by-twelve and a twelve-by-eighteen with a feeder on. It wasn't a Kluge; it was a twelve-by-eighteen Chandler and Price with a feeder.

DOCTER: Was it possibly a Miller feeder?

CHENEY: No, it was a Kluge feeder.

DOCTER: Oh, a Kluge.

CHENEY: Chandler and Price.

DOCTER: I see. I see. Actually, the old Chandler and Price platen presses were seen in almost every print shop thirty years ago, weren't they? Perhaps with a Kluge on the bigger ones. It seemed like it was the standard press for years and years.

CHENEY: Yes, they usually had one, even though they'd have Miehles and cylinder presses, Kellys and Miehles

and would also have at least an eight-by-ten, eight-by-twelve Chandler and Price to do card jobs.

DOCTER: Right. It was a very practical press.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Often, I think, they would have a ten-by-fifteen in many shops.

CHENEY: Yes. They usually like to get eight-by-twelves, though. They were a little smaller, and more convenient, and easier for card jobs, and so forth. I know, when I was looking around for a press, it was easier to find ten-by-fifteens than it was to find eight-by-twelves, and they were cheaper, too. The little eight-by-twelves were quite desirable presses to have, at that time.

DOCTER: Yes, they're a little easier to wash up, too.

CHENEY: Yes, well, they don't take up as much room, and they're big enough for very small jobs, which is what they were used for.

DOCTER: Card jobs and stationery. Right. Now, you got your Pilot press, then, along toward the end of the forties.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: And I guess we ought to say that the Pilot is a side-lever handpress. Where did you get that, and how much did you pay for it?

CHENEY: I got it at Leach's Printer's Supply Company; used to be down on Wall Street. I don't know whether it

still is or not.

DOCTER: I think it's still there.

CHENEY: Yes. And, let's see, it's a six-by-ten. And I think it was about \$95 to \$100, something like that, at that time. I suppose it's about \$300, now.

DOCTER: More.

CHENEY: More than that?

DOCTER: Yes, the new ones are well over that, now. I saw a catalog recently; I think they're something around \$400. Well, you bought it from Leach's, but did you get all of your printing equipment there, or did you buy it from several wholesalers?

CHENEY: Well, that's not a wholesaler, that's a retail place. It must have been type I originally bought from ATF, which had a--it was out on Third Street near Central, at that time. And at that time, they still sold fonts of type.

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: I think it's now in the Steward Company; what type they do sell is handled by Steward.

DOCTER: At that time, still in the late forties, I think ATF had factory offices in all the bigger cities that were all stocked with all kinds of fonts, weren't they?

CHENEY: Pretty well stocked. Sometimes they had to

send back to Elizabeth, New Jersey, for it. But they could only buy job fonts. It wasn't like the days in the thirties when you could order weight fonts, like the eleven-point Caslon I used to have. I got two job fonts of capitals and a hundred-pound weight font of lower case. It was enough to fill two news cases, lower-case news cases. Those days were gone by the late forties.

DOCTER: Yes. Well, now, after you left Muir and Watts, did you go to a different shop, or set up. . . ?

CHENEY: No, I set up my own, set up this Pilot press in the basement.

DOCTER: Yes. Started printing on that.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: And were you printing commercially or just for fun or both?

CHENEY: Well, I was printing commercially, insofar as I had jobs. Printed booklets for Dawson's, printed some for Jake. Actually did better work on that than I did on the ten-by-fifteen. Books of the Los Angeles District by Gregg Layne. It was done on the Pilot. I think it was a better job than I ever did on the ten-by-fifteen.

DOCTER: Do you think so? Well, what was the difference?

CHENEY: Oh, maybe it was just better press work. It was a good little press.

DOCTER: Now, that's the press that you sold to a lady

over in the Huntington Library, is it?

CHENEY: Yes, Carol Cockel. She printed something that was in the Western Books Exhibit, something about Sir Kenelm Digby. I suppose some recipes, or things, or something like that, she'd printed.

DOCTER: I see. And then, was your next move to the shop adjoining Jake Zeitlin's bookshop out on La Cienega?

CHENEY: Over on Pico--1410 (or was it 1014?)--1410 West Pico. It's near where the police station used to be, where the Sears, Roebuck is. I was there for about five years, had a shop in back of a building there, and then I moved up on La Cienega and was there from '55 to '62.

DOCTER: That was the one next to Zeitlin's.

CHENEY: Near him.

DOCTER: From '55 to '62. And when did you add the ten-by-fifteen Chandler press?

CHENEY: Well, I got that, oh, back in 1950, thereabouts. That's when I moved over to Pico, the shop on Pico.

DOCTER: And that's the press that you sold to me.

CHENEY: Yes. I got that at the Steward Company. It had been--at least their account of it was that it was part of a school. When I saw it first, it had this shield over the flywheel and over the gear.

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: And a counter and a brake on it. So I bought

it, and then when I went down to pick it up, why, the shields were gone. I didn't mind that, but the brake was gone, and they said it never had had a brake, and there wasn't any counter on it. I did manage to make them give me a counter, but that's the only thing I got out of it. The brake you saw, I stole from the press at the Clark, the school press that they had for a while there.

DOCTER: I see. It's a very useful thing to have.

CHENEY: Yes, but up till that time, for fifteen years or so, I used the press without a brake. Just let it run down, hold your hand next to the flywheel, below it.

DOCTER: I see. Now, when you moved up to the shop adjoining Jake Zeitlin's bookstore on La Cienega, why did you move?

CHENEY: Well, I was tired of being over on Pico, and it was too small, the quarters over there, and this seemed like a better place.

DOCTER: I see. Did Jake Zeitlin suggest it?

CHENEY: Yes. He found the place there.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: You see, he knew that there was this vacancy there.

DOCTER: But it actually had nothing to do with his

store; it was separate entirely.

CHENEY: No, it's three or four doors away from his store.

DOCTER: Oh, was it?

CHENEY: Yes. You know where Munn Picture Frames is? It was in the back of that building.

DOCTER: I see. I remember being there.

CHENEY: Yes, you were doing a book on Yosemite when you came in there one time, and . . .

DOCTER: Yes. Now, in 1962, was that the year you moved to the Clark Library?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: How did that come about? Who suggested it?

CHENEY: Well, I think Glen Dawson suggested it. I don't know whether he talked to Powell about it, or whether it was an idea that just occurred to him. He wanted to know why I didn't move over to Clark. They had this space over there, and it might be a good place for me to do work for the university and do my own work, too.

DOCTER: Well, in negotiating it and working out the deal, did you make any arrangement to do a certain amount of work for the Clark or for the University of California?

CHENEY: Yes, the idea was that I could do--well, no specific amount, but I was to do work for them, and no

money would change hands one way or another. Well, they couldn't have had any money changing hands; they would have got in trouble with the unions or whatnot.

DOCTER: But the idea was to help them out when they needed special . . .

CHENEY: Yes. I'd do what they wanted, and they didn't charge me any rent.

DOCTER: I see. Well, did they ask for a great amount of work or just a job a month or once a year? How much did they really expect you to do?

CHENEY: Well, they didn't expect too much, unless some professor or somebody like Max Novak, who didn't understand what was involved, would expect one to get something out within a day, and it would take a week, or something of that sort. But it came in bunches. Sometimes there'd be a month with almost nothing to do, and other times there'd be six or eight things in a week to do. It was sporadic.

DOCTER: You would, of course, continue to do the same kinds of commercial work that you had always done, that would pay something, in addition. When did you get started with the miniatures?

CHENEY: Well, I think, on my own accord, I did a miniature type-specimen book when I was in the basement here with the Pilot press.

DOCTER: Was that at this same address?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: There's a basement here?

CHENEY: Yes. Down there where the furnaces are, and I had cleaning solvent over next to the furnace. [laughter] And that appealed to Glen Dawson, so it occurred to him to have a Gettysburg Address done in miniature. I did that for him, and, off and on over the years, I did other miniatures. And I think it's only in the last five or six years that miniatures have become a mania, now, and a specialty of the Dawsons. I've done about, oh, two a year for them.

DOCTER: That they have commissioned.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: If this is too personal, let's just not answer it, but in dealing with publishers, like the Dawsons or anyone else, do they ordinarily guarantee a certain price for putting out a book? Or do they ask you to do it on speculation?

CHENEY: Well, I've done it as a job. Charge and set my price on what I do the printing for.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: And, of course, if one does the binding, one charges for that. Bela Blau has done the binding on the things I've done for Dawson's.

DOCTER: Right.

CHENEY: But I did it simply as a job.

DOCTER: Now, it occurs to me that, somewhere along the line, you mentioned in one of your letters that have been published that you worked for a short time with Saul Marks.

CHENEY: Yes. Six weeks.

DOCTER: Six weeks! [laughter] Could you tell me about that? When was it?

CHENEY: Oh, that was in 1950, around in the spring of 1950. Let's see, he was doing Aldrich's journal at that time. And I worked on that, and then odds and ends of work that he had. He did some commercial work, too. And there it was a--not a Colt. What's that other press? Laureate. He had 3,000 cards to print. I remember working for two days on that Laureate, printing 3,000 cards. It was a slow thing. Well, you know how a Colt is. I think the Laureate's even slower.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: He wanted a pressman; he didn't want a typesetter.

DOCTER: Oh, you were feeding the press?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Did he have any other employees?

CHENEY: Not right at that time. Nobody else. He's had

various employees, sometimes two or three at a time, sometimes none, as it happens. But Lillian was working with him; she operated the puncher, the . . .

DOCTER: . . . monotype?

CHENEY: The tape puncher, the monotype. And I think he operated the caster.

DOCTER: Did you have any desire to stay working there? Or was it just a temporary deal?

CHENEY: Well, it was temporary, yes. I wanted to work just to learn what I could, working for Saul Marks. Before that, I worked for Dahlstrom for about a month or so.

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CHENEY: This is the thing I did for Paul Jordan-Smith.

DOCTER: A book.

CHENEY: I showed you that before.

DOCTER: Oh, yes.

CHENEY: And then this is the collection of Fortnightly Intruders.

DOCTER: Oh, yes, those are interesting.

CHENEY: Those were done in '36 and '37. This, I think, was in '34.

DOCTER: Did you bind this?

CHENEY: Yes, but that's just throwing them together, and we just made a binding over it.

DOCTER: I see. Did you teach yourself the art of book-binding?

CHENEY: No. I didn't. I never did much binding. That's just to hold that together. Just took what I could find around and sewed it together and put that on there.

DOCTER: Well, you never did much binding, but this is bound, I mean . . .

CHENEY: Yes. The other one that I gave to Etter was the second one I made, and I got it tighter in the back and got a better binding on it. That's the first one I did. I did two--one for myself and one for him.

DOCTER: Well, with these early things, here, you started with a lot of Caslon. When you were over there in Angeleno Heights, how did you decide on Caslon? What influenced you?

CHENEY: Well, I liked it. Well, I'd worked with Garamond with Stricker, and we suggested--I suggested that; and it was really the editor who liked the Caslon better. He said he thought it looked better. And I agreed, finally--thought about it--because it can be turned to any purpose, used for anything, you know.

DOCTER: Well, was Etter a printer?

CHENEY: No, he was a banker. That is, he was working in a bank, at that time.

DOCTER: But he knew something about type.

CHENEY: Well, just an outsider's view of it. He had a taste and could see what type looked like. He had no experience in printing and typesetting.

DOCTER: Did you get that Caslon, then, from ATF?

CHENEY: Yes, it was down there on Los Angeles Street, down near Second and Los Angeles.

DOCTER: That was the factory office?

CHENEY: Yes. You could just walk in and buy fonts of type, including weight fonts.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: We got two job fonts of capitals and a fifty-

pound weight font of lower case in twelve-point and then in eleven-point, which is the main typeface; and then we got a hundred-pound weight font of lower case. You could just walk in and buy it in those days.

DOCTER: Caslon was really the first face that you had. The other type was Stricker's.

CHENEY: Well, the Garamond that I used in that Voyage to Trolland, I set that in Stricker's place and printed it on his press, just before I got a press myself, and type.

DOCTER: Well, then, what would be the very first piece that you did of your own?

CHENEY: That's the first thing I did myself. I did all that myself.

DOCTER: A Voyage to Trolland.

CHENEY: Yes. But it wasn't with my type, and I think, probably, that the first thing that was really a job, a serious job, that I did, after I got my press and some Caslon type, was the Zamorano membership list of 1933.

DOCTER: On your proof press.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: In 1933. Well, were you a member?

CHENEY: No, I wasn't. I was just getting a job.

What's that cat into, out there?

DOCTER: Better catch him.

CHENEY: Well, I guess there isn't anything she can get into. She's just scraping around.

DOCTER: Just scratching around, huh?

CHENEY: In that box out there.

DOCTER: Well, now, this Voyage to Trolland, this is copyright 1933 also, so, along with the printing of the Zamorano membership list, these would have been the very first items.

CHENEY: Yes. This was done in the spring and summer of '33, and Stricker had a place in a barn down on, oh, south of Washington and Toberman Street. And I used to walk down there, walk down and back, from up there on Angeleno Heights at Sunset.

DOCTER: Quite a walk.

CHENEY: Yes, but I didn't mind.

DOCTER: No streetcar?

CHENEY: Well, there was, but I didn't mind the walk. It took me about an hour each way.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: But I got the press, oh, around the fall of '33. October, along in there somewhere. And then I was rather shy about telling Stricker about it, thinking he'd probably be envious or resent it that I'd gone out and bought a press for myself. But he took it all right.

DOCTER: Was he that kind of guy? Would he be envious?

CHENEY: No, I don't think so. He didn't mind, but I just felt, since I'd been working for him and with him, and I went out suddenly and got a press, I thought that he might resent it. But he didn't. Actually, Etter and I went into partnership. We bought it together, planning to start a little magazine or something, but the magazine didn't get started till about three years later, in '36.

DOCTER: What was Etter's full name?

CHENEY: William Kirby Etter.

DOCTER: And do I recall that that's the fellow who was the son of a railroad executive?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: So, he had some resources to help get a little printing . . .

CHENEY: Yes. Well, he was employed. He was working for Farmer's and Merchants Bank at that time. He was in the trust department of Farmer's and Merchants. And the Santa Fe did its banking there, and I think that's how he happened to get in there.

DOCTER: I see. Did that bank become Manufacturer's bank?

CHENEY: No, it was absorbed by the Security [First National Bank, now Security-Pacific].

DOCTER: Security, I see.

CHENEY: It was the Farmer's and Merchants branch of the

Security, now. It's over on Fourth and Main.

DOCTER: Yeah. I know the building. Very old building, now, grayish. What became of Etter?

CHENEY: Oh, he was in the navy during the war and then stayed in the diplomatic service. And he died in '53 in an airplane trip between East and West Pakistan. He was assigned to Pakistan at that time. Had a heart attack on the plane, coming back from East Pakistan (which is now Bangladesh) to Pakistan.

DOCTER: This was a State Department job? Diplomatic service?

CHENEY: Yes. I don't know just what his position was, but he was in the diplomatic service.

DOCTER: I see. Did he ever do any printing or designing?

CHENEY: No. He wrote the editorials for this Intruder, but he wasn't himself interested in setting type.

DOCTER: I see. Was he much of a bookman?

CHENEY: Yes. You mean interested in writing and literature?

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: Yes, he was interested in it. But he wasn't a professional. He was interested in it.

DOCTER: Well, now, when you began this Voyage to Trolland, this is entirely a Will Cheney fabrication--tale. Am I right?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: For the fun of it.

CHENEY: Yes. Actually, it was Stricker's idea that I should do that. I'd been working on a Trollish language. I hadn't--hadn't written an account of Trolland, and it was his idea that I write one, and I changed it a little from the historical Trolland of my languages, set a long time ago. It was different from this point; it was comic. Trolland. But the idea here was to popularize it and sell the thing and make a lot of money. I think I printed 150 copies and maybe bound about twenty-five of them, and then I was through with that.

DOCTER: What about this Trollish language?

CHENEY: Well, are we on the air now?

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: It'd take a little while. I could dig out an old grammar of Trollish. [laughter]

DOCTER: Is it a language that you could actually speak?

CHENEY: Oh, you could if. . . . [tape recorder turned off; brings out maps and grammar book] There are maps of Trollish land, and the ice-folks land, and so forth, and this is the language.

DOCTER: Ah. My.

CHENEY: It goes on. It has examples of the poetry and how it's metered.

DOCTER: When did you create this language?

CHENEY: Well, off and on. It started when I was in high school.

DOCTER: Well, this says, "A brief, compact, and compendious grammar of the Trollish language, together with conversations in Trollish and English. Readings from the better authors and miscellaneous matter." But it's undated. What date should be on that title page?

CHENEY: I don't know; that's probably some time in the thirties that I did that last edition of it, but it began back in the twenties. When I was still in tenth grade or so in high school, I began devising a Trollish language, but it went through many changes. As I went on, got a year or two older, I'd rehash the language and change it. Tried to get the Germanic element out and more of a Celtic element into it.

DOCTER: What we're looking at here, just for the record, is a salmon-colored notebook, similar to the kind that would be used in high school or college. Roughly, its outside dimensions are perhaps 5 1/2 wide x 8 inches tall. It says on the cover, printed there, "University School Series Composition Book," and then a little number, I guess sort of an order number or something, "R-580." And I would judge that this is the only copy of this in your own handwriting, isn't it?

CHENEY: Oh, yeah.

DOCTER: So, in a way, this is the beginning of Trollish. It's all there is of Trollish. But when you think of an entire language being created here, with the alphabet and the consonants and the vowels and the diphthongs and a grammar--that's a tremendous achievement to do that.

CHENEY: Yes. I think that's been done. I didn't know about it before, but--oh, this--who was it that wrote the Ring of the. . . . [Tolkien: Lord of the Rings]

DOCTER: Oh, yes, for the three volumes?

CHENEY: Yes, I can't think of the name of it now, but I think they have a language. And some other peoples have made languages, imaginary languages. Not like Esperanto, and languages of that sort, but just imaginary languages that elves and gnomes would speak.

DOCTER: But this you have never printed, this language?

CHENEY: No. Except for the specimens that get in that Voyage to Trolland.

DOCTER: Yes. Well, I don't want to put you on the spot here, not too much, but is there any possibility that you could think seriously about arranging for something this valuable and this unique to find its way into the University [Library Department of] Special Collections so that people could see the kind of thing you've created?

CHENEY: Well, I might think about it sometime, but . . .

DOCTER: You certainly don't need to decide, but I think it . . .

CHENEY: Yes. It would be thrown away otherwise. I don't have anyone to leave it to.

DOCTER: I wish you'd think about it, because this is such a unique and highly original piece of work. And I'm sure that at the time it was done, you had no real model to go by, I don't think, had you? Other than knowing English.

CHENEY: Well, the influence is English. It's based on English, and it's imaginary, but, of course, there's influences of German and Latin and English.

DOCTER: The calligraphy in here is very attractive, and I think it's well known that you have a fine calligraphic hand. Where did you learn this calligraphic style?

CHENEY: I didn't know it was calligraphic. I thought it was just scribbled.

DOCTER: Well. . . .

CHENEY: Well, it's hand printed, there.

DOCTER: But there's some very nice initials in here. I guess it's the kind of a script that might have been taught in handwriting at the time that you were in school.

CHENEY: No, I think it's just playing around with the pen.

DOCTER: It's a most amazing piece of work. And then, the Voyage to Trolland was, in a way, an extension of that language.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: And what is the story, basically? What does the story reveal?

CHENEY: Well, somebody--I don't know that it means anything--somebody heard about Trolland, and, I think, heard about it on that radio there or something, and set out to find it. And then when he comes there, why, he travels around and describes the different parts of Trolland and Trollish customs, and so on. It was really Stricker's idea that I write it in some form like that, that can popularize it, instead of being satisfied with the grammar of the language, which was all that I'd thought of before. And it had some history, like these maps, and I think there are pictures of rulers of Trolland, and so forth; but I never tried to have anyone go there and actually see them. Really, the Voyage to Trolland is really a different thing; it wasn't the way I'd conceived at first.

DOCTER: It's very reminiscent of the maps and language in the book with the author that we can't think of, the Englishman, who had a very popular . . .

CHENEY: Tolkien.

DOCTER: Yes. Yes. The Tolkien trilogy. Yes.

CHENEY: But I hadn't heard of him. I don't know whether he was writing at that time.

DOCTER: I don't think so. When you first began to design the book A Voyage to Trolland, did you lay it out page by

page or set a page to see what it would look like or--
what was your style for planning this?

CHENEY: First conceived of about the page size I
wanted, and then I designed it, the page, the same way
I still do. I figured how many lines I could get on the
page, considering the margins and the size of type. I
set eight pages, and he had enough of that fourteen-point
Garamond that I could set eight pages.

DOCTER: This is all fourteen-point Garamond, huh?

CHENEY: Yes. Smoky, get away from there.

DOCTER: Oh, she won't hurt that old coat.

CHENEY: Well, she can chew a hole in it. [laughter]

DOCTER: Really?

CHENEY: That's why we have to keep her out of the bed-
room, because she gets in there and burrows down in the
bed and chews holes in the blankets.

DOCTER: Oh, for goodness sake.

With reference to this Voyage to Trolland, this is
especially interesting, since it's certainly the first
book that you produced, isn't it?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: It has the appearance of a very classical layout
with reference to the relationship between the margins
and the center space, and the line spacing. Is this based
on any instruction or guidance or counseling that you
ever. . . ?

CHENEY: Yes, I had some counseling from Stricker. He'd had experience with printed books himself, and he gave me some advice on laying it out. Well, he more or less oversaw it. I didn't know at that time just the proportions of lower margin to upper, and so on, and he gave me some advice on that.

DOCTER: I see. Well, Stricker must have had a fairly classical style himself. This is a very attractive page; uncrowded, and yet put together nicely; and sort of generous margins at the bottom, but not wasteful. Had he been, in any sense, a commercial book designer?

CHENEY: Well, he was commercial in that he worked to sell his books.

DOCTER: But he wouldn't have been with a publishing company?

CHENEY: Well, no, he was a private printer. But he'd had several years' experience at the time that I knew him.

DOCTER: I see. Now, this is an interesting notation in your own writing here at the beginning. I'm almost overwhelmed. It says, "Please return, eventually, this being the only copy I know of."

CHENEY: It's the only one I had, anyway. Apparently, there're some others around and about. There's one in that Reynolds catalog, I know.

DOCTER: Is there?

CHENEY: Yes, he has it listed there.

DOCTER: Oh, that's right. You mentioned that last week.

CHENEY: Well, I'd lent it to someone and wrote that in there, because, you know, when you lend books, you don't get them back; but whoever--I don't remember who it was but whoever I lent it to must have returned it.

DOCTER: Is there a copy of this at the Clark?

CHENEY: I don't know. I don't know whether there is or not.

DOCTER: All of the linoleum blocks you cut. Just what procedures did you follow, there, in cutting them?

CHENEY: Well, I drew it on the block. It has white paint on the surface, and I drew it on the block, and then they came out in reverse. You can draw them and then transfer from a sheet, you know, to the white surfacing and have it in obverse. But I didn't care which direction they faced, so I drew it right on the block, then cut it with tools, linoleum tools--knives and gougers.

DOCTER: Now, have you given up on the linoleum blocks or do you still do them?

CHENEY: No. I don't do them. There's no use doing them when you can get zinc cuts made to a drawing; but I don't do much drawing, anyway, anymore. I did at that time.

DOCTER: Have you ever thought of being a free-lance

artist?

CHENEY: Oh, yes.

DOCTER: Well, you worked at it some, of course, didn't you, for newspaper drawings?

CHENEY: Yes. When I was out looking for some of these other things, I ran across a lot of pig strips, that I did a long time--and was going to do, you know, like the comic strips.

DOCTER: Oh.

CHENEY: And I did about fifty or sixty of them, and I showed them to Gale, who used to be the staff cartoonist at the Times. And he said, "They're too whimsical. They won't do." So then I went to [George] Herriman, who drew Krazy Kat, and when he first looked at them, he said, "You're pretty good, aren't you?" And then as he looked them over, he said, "Oh, they won't sell, they're too whimsical." And he said, "Your line's too fussy and too self-conscious. You have to have a freer stroke." So I started over again then, with larger ones and heavily inking. And that wasn't my style. The spirit was gone out of them when I tried to make them bold.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: Thin, fussy lines seems to be my style--or was, when I used to draw. I haven't drawn in thirty years, it's too much trouble. It's easier to set type than it

is to draw.

DOCTER: Now here's an interesting paragraph from A Voyage to Trolland. It says, "Having drunk the beer and found it good, he and his moxie set forth and traveled together," and so forth. Now, did you do any drinking with Stricker?

CHENEY: Oh, that was about the time that Prohibition went out. Yes, we occasionally had something to drink. We couldn't afford very--ouch! This cat!

DOCTER: That cat's pretty funny. [laughter] She get you?

CHENEY: Yes, I got scratched.

DOCTER: Oh. [laughter] I think that cat runs the place.

CHENEY: Now stop that.

DOCTER: He's having a lot of fun there, isn't he?

CHENEY: Here, you stop it. Stop it.

Well, we used to have a bottle of ale together or something like that. We didn't drink much.

DOCTER: Well, did Stricker have anything of a drinking problem?

CHENEY: Well, yes, he did, later. I think he had an alcoholic tendency.

DOCTER: Did it interfere with his career?

CHENEY: I think maybe it did. You know, he died comparatively young, back in 1945, back in New York. I

don't know that--well, I don't want to repeat it, because I'm not sure. Jake told me something about it. --I think he had been out on a binge, but I don't know for sure that that's the reason he got pneumonia, which is an ailment of alcoholics, you know. They don't eat enough.

I think I'll wash this--you want to shut that thing off? I'm going to wash my hand off. The cat scratched it.
DOCTER: Yeah, we'll turn it off for a minute here. [tape recorder turned off] Did you ever get Mrs. Cheney involved in any of this printing stuff?

CHENEY: No, she's not much interested in it.

DOCTER: No? She never set any type?

CHENEY: No, I don't think that she wants to. She just doesn't take to it. Doesn't have the graphic arts temperament. She's interested in the results, but as for doing it, I don't think it would interest her.

DOCTER: Well, most printers' wives don't do much printing. Just a few.

CHENEY: Yes. I don't know whether it's an advantage or not. It's an advantage to have them sympathetic, but if they get into it, they may surpass one, and that wouldn't be . . .

DOCTER: A little uncomfortable. [laughter] Very true. This other piece, Art of Reviling.

CHENEY: She'll chew your shoelaces if she gets started there.

DOCTER: Oh. Let's see, the Art of Reviling. Here it is, here. This Art of Reviling was also one of the very earliest, am I right? In '36.

CHENEY: Yes. That's translated from the Chinese.

DOCTER: Right. And I guess you were still living over at the Angeleno Heights area.

CHENEY: Yes, I think I was over there at that time.

DOCTER: And William Pettus, was he a local sponsor of fine printing, or. . . ?

CHENEY: Well, he was a member--he was interested in it--of the Zamorano club. He was a friend of Gay Beaman, that's how I came to do this. Gay Beaman had it done for Pettus.

DOCTER: Now, who was Beaman?

CHENEY: Well, A. Gaylord Beaman. He was a member of the Zamorano club, and he was an insurance broker and a sort of patron of printers. That's how I came to know Stricker, was through Beaman. And I met Beaman when I was employed at Dawson's; he was a regular customer there. And he saw my Trollish grammar. I had it down there, and that interested him. That's how I came to know him. Well, I think that's why he introduced me to Stricker, to see if something could be done about the Trollish grammar.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: And he was a bit disappointed that it wasn't like

that grammar, that it didn't concentrate on the language and the history of Trolland instead of this account of a voyage to Trolland, which was a different sort of thing. But this was Stricker's idea--that you could get somebody to read this, and you couldn't get them to read that grammar.

DOCTER: Well, Stricker had good judgment, in that sense, didn't he? The grammar would have been a keepsake, but the Voyage is a story. Well, what became of Beaman?

CHENEY: He died. He was an older man, that is, older than we were at that time. I was in my twenties, and Stricker was in his thirties, and Beaman was forty-five to fifty at that time.

DOCTER: Well, he and William B. Pettus were behind this Art of Reviling. You notice any important differences between your printing in 1933 and this 1936 piece? Were there any big changes in equipment or your own approach or technique?

CHENEY: I had the same press I was on, until I sold it in 1941. It was a Poco proof press. I inked it by hand and laid the paper on the type and then the bed slid under the cylinder. Picked the paper up and set it aside and inked the type again.

DOCTER: How did you get registration?

CHENEY: Well, I made a back to set the paper against.

It was a five-line piece of furniture, planed off on the fore edge and leaving a little shoulder at the back, and I laid the paper up against that. I locked that up in the chase and laid the paper against it. Had a space, oh, a fourteen-point space, pasted down at one end, so that I could lock the paper against that.

DOCTER: I see. What's the story of this Rabelaisian Phancies?

CHENEY: Well, it was written by Paul Jordan-Smith, and I think it tells in the introduction there. The first part of it he'd printed, oh, ten years before that. He had some job printer do it. And then he wrote a supplement to it, which appears first in here.

DOCTER: And how did you get involved in the project?

CHENEY: Oh, I think he wanted Stricker to do it, and Stricker didn't want to do it; and so I got the job.

DOCTER: This is a seventy-six page book. Was this done on the proof press?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Tremendous amount of work.

CHENEY: Yes, but it wasn't a large edition. I don't know just how many copies, whether it was 200 copies or what.

DOCTER: Is this one of the longest books you've ever done?

CHENEY: Oh, I think probably the Essays and Footnotes is

the longest. Of course, you take all those Intruders together, that makes it about the greatest bulk.-

DOCTER: What kind of time was involved in doing this book?

CHENEY: Well, it went on over two or three months, I suppose.

DOCTER: Would you get up each morning and start hand-setting type and try to get out a couple of pages?

CHENEY: No, I worked at it off and on. I'd set steadily all day sometimes, and other days I wouldn't work on that. It doesn't take so long when it's body type and you're setting text--all one type. You get going, and you can set page after page.

DOCTER: Are there any important mistakes in this book?

CHENEY: Well, in that book they wouldn't matter; you wouldn't know whether they were mistakes or not. Spelling is whatever it's supposed to be in the style of sixteenth- or seventeenth-century English printing, in which the typesetters varied the spelling to justify the line anyway. You wouldn't know whether it was a mistake. I suppose you mean typographical errors. They wouldn't matter in that book.

DOCTER: This book offers both--well, it has the two title pages. And would you say again, the purpose of publishing both title pages?

CHENEY: Well, I suppose it's an imaginary Antwerp edition, or something. One title page there, at least, was some Antwerp edition in sixteen-something. Something like that. Just an imaginary title page for a supposed edition.

DOCTER: Well, now, you're responsible for several imaginary things, aren't you? I recall a letter, not too many years ago, that you actually wrote after a Rounce and Coffin meeting. I think Robert Trogman had put on quite a performance complaining about the food. And I think you wrote a letter, didn't you, as if it was from Trogman? Or how did that work out?

CHENEY: Well, supposed to be from Grant Dahlstrom, describing the meeting.

DOCTER: Yes. Remind me of that. How did that come up? What were the circumstances?

CHENEY: Well, the circumstance were the scene at that meeting when Trogman had to have chicken whether he wanted it or not, and he tried to send it back, and they wouldn't take it back because it had been ordered for the whole club, you know. And if he did take it back and get something else, he'd still have to pay for it and buy the other item separately. And he was going to storm out of there, but his wife and Cornett Wood talked him out of it.

DOCTER: He was pretty upset.

CHENEY: Well, he was upset that you have to eat chicken whether you wanted to or not, and he didn't believe in chicken. And he said that they should have beef because that's the one thing that everybody likes, and so on. But he had quite a time about that.

DOCTER: And then you wrote this imaginary piece describing it and embellishing it a little, I think, as if it was from Dahlstrom.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Dahlstrom must have gotten quite a laugh out of it.

CHENEY: Yes, well, Dahlstrom printed the piece, you know.

DOCTER: Did he?

CHENEY: Yes, he printed it and added some marginal notes. And he turned it--of course these whimsies get involved--he printed it as if I'd written it, which I had; but he was supposed to have written it. But he printed it as if I'd written it, and he wrote the--no, he printed it as if he'd written it, but that I'd written the marginalia. But, actually, he added the marginalia. It was kind of an involved thing.

DOCTER: Well, it's an example of a kind of an in-joke, isn't it?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: The people who were there would particularly

appreciate the humor of it. And I recall getting a big bang out of it myself.

CHENEY: Yeah, I think Trogman himself enjoyed it. He gave me a call afterwards and talked about how much he enjoyed it.

DOCTER: Where did you get the inspiration for writing that? Did you think of it later, or did you think of it that night?

CHENEY: Well, I don't know, I think it was the next few days, I just wrote this account--it was just an account--of the meeting as I saw it.

DOCTER: But don't several of your books, your little pieces--particularly the Pig Latin and the Footnotes, and so on--don't they often have some in-joke in them that only a few people would be aware of?

CHENEY: Yes, probably.

DOCTER: I remember your pointing out to me the way that the character of certain italic letters in the book that used Greek developed certain forms, parts of the anatomy, even, that were kind of funny and unusual.

CHENEY: Yeah, that was Civilitéé. I think that was Civilitéé. The p and the y--the tails of the p and the y joined together?

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: And if you write the word--if you set the word

Callipygian, why, you get a Callipygian design from the tails of the p and the y.

DOCTER: Right. When you start to do a job like a book, or even one of the miniatures, do you make a careful layout first?

CHENEY: Well, I make a layout. I don't know how careful it is, but I design the page and margins, figure how many lines, and figure my margins.

DOCTER: So you had a pretty good idea of just what it's going to shape up to in the length?

CHENEY: Oh, yes, if you know how many words there are in the manuscript, why. . . . When it's my own material, I usually don't know, because the manuscript's written on the backs of envelopes and tag ends of paper, and so on. I have to make a guess how long it'll be, but usually I guess pretty well.

DOCTER: Can you recall any particular goofs in jobs like that? Where your plans didn't work out?

CHENEY: Plans usually work out. The goofs are usually just carelessness--getting pages in the wrong order, or something of that sort.

DOCTER: Even in something that's bound?

CHENEY: Yes, sometimes it . . .

DOCTER: Or printing them in the wrong order? Perhaps that's what you meant.

CHENEY: Well, yes, that's happened. Sometimes they're printed in the wrong order. When you're doing it yourself and setting the type and blocking it up and printing it, and nobody proofreads but the one person, why, there are errors that get through. You can't see your own errors till after they're done.

DOCTER: On this little program, for the Wilshire Ebell Theatre, February 19th, 1936, this dance concert program, notice the lettering of Florence Gordon at the top?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Saul Marks always objected to letter spacing of that kind.

CHENEY: Letter spacing lower case. But I wanted it to go clear across. I think there's--after all, that's Caslon Oldstyle. It depends on what you're using. If he's using some modern style or some German face where you don't do that, it's different. But I think there's a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English precedent for letter spacing lower case if you want to fill a line.

DOCTER: Is that right? I didn't know that. Well, I know he always felt strongly about it. I recall once, when he was giving a course up at USC, he was showing some students a piece; and in it there was one page that had a very short line of Bembo Narrow Italic. And everyone immediately noticed that it was spaced, that there was spacing in it--

just a little bit, but it was noticeable. So everyone asked him, "How come you did this, especially with italic?" And he laughed and said that the guy that had asked him to do the printing requested that one change. And what he said was, "I agreed to it, and I did it, and the world didn't come to an end after all." I always got a bang out of that.

CHENEY: Well, with Bembo it would be noticeable because that's a very closely fit type; but Caslon Oldstyle is rather spotty anyway. Irregular fit.

DOCTER: If you were going to buy a type today, assuming any of the alphabets were available--if you were going to go out and buy type today, assuming you had nothing now, what would you choose for book work?

CHENEY: Well, with me, text is the most important, and I'd stick with Baskerville, I think, because I think it's the most generally usable type.

DOCTER: The capitals are beautiful, aren't they?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: They're bold, and yet they have a delicacy and a contrast. Do you find the capitals particularly attractive?

CHENEY: Yes, I think Baskerville hit it about right; the right contrast of thick and thin. And his capital R is the best that's ever been achieved.

DOCTER: Kind of straight, isn't it?

CHENEY: Yes, it is straight, but you compare that with a Bodoni R, with its curved tail, and you'll see that the Baskerville is much better. It has to be just right. The tail of the R has to come at just the right angle, and fit just at the right point on the bowl. And he hit it off right.

DOCTER: Well, then, perhaps you would not like the capital R in Bembo, because it has such a long, curving tail on it. Do you recall that Bembo capital R?

CHENEY: Well, doesn't it curve down?

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: More of a concave curve. That isn't so bad as the Bodoni curved R. It comes . . .

DOCTER: Yes. Both ways. I see what you mean.

CHENEY: I think I'll put this cat outside. You want to shut that off?

DOCTER: Okay. Well, we can get up and stretch our legs here for a minute. [tape recorder turned off]

CHENEY: When they [the cartoons] start they're kind of self-conscious and stiff, but as they get on, why, they become--the action becomes a little . . .

DOCTER: Now, would this have been, say, 1933? These cartoons?

CHENEY: No, 1930, around there.

DOCTER: Around '30? So this was intended to become a

comic strip, a commercial comic strip.

CHENEY: See, as it gets on, the spirit gets freer. I draw them more . . .

DOCTER: Goodness, that's a tremendous amount of artwork.

CHENEY: Well, I put in my evenings at this while I was working at Dawson's. They're trying to launch a raft here. They crawl underneath the raft. The raft springs a leak.

DOCTER: Did you ever offer these to a publisher?

CHENEY: No, I was going to. I didn't know just what to do. I was going to try to get the Times to take them. That's why I saw--their staff cartoonist was Gale at that time, like Conrad. Gale was very matter-of-fact. Well, anyway, that's the idea about that.

DOCTER: But he looked at them?

CHENEY: Well, he said they were too whimsical; they'd never sell.

DOCTER: Too whimsical? Well, what did he mean by whimsical? Too fantastic?

CHENEY: I suppose so. That was in 1930, and nowadays they probably wouldn't be too whimsical, but they were then.

DOCTER: Just a little too far from a real creature.

CHENEY: Yes. Of course, later pigs came in. Disney had a pig strip. That was later; that was in the 1940s, I

believe.

DOCTER: But there were no pigs at this time? -

CHENEY: I don't think so.

DOCTER: In a way, it was ahead of its time.

CHENEY: Yes. Well, at least that's what Herriman suggested--that people just wouldn't go for pigs. Herriman was the one that drew Krazy Kat, you know. He wasn't too whimsical.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO

JANUARY 31, 1975

DOCTER: We just got out some comic strip drawings going back to the early thirties. Introducing Pot Pig, just out of school and ready to make a big success of life. Now, this is a remarkable pig who had various adventures, and Mr. Cheney was mentioning, as the tape was running out, that upon presenting these for consideration by a newspaper--he took them around to various publishers, as I understand it, and they thought that they maybe were a little too whimsical, a little too far from the real life.

So, then you tried making them a little differently, but it still didn't come off in a way that was satisfactory. And I guess, eventually--was this the end of the cartooning effort, then?

CHENEY: Well, of that sort of thing--of doing the comic strip. By the time I did about sixty of those--and then I started them over, doing them with a heavier line--the spirit had gone out of them by then. I lost interest in the comic strip by that time.

DOCTER: Well, Will, just so you'll know that there's a serious interest, if you ever have an inclination to allow the Special Collections people to acquire some of these things, I think they're the kinds of things that, in

years to come, people interested in you and in the history of printing in Southern California will be interested in this kind of early work. But I just mention it, because I'm sure someone would like to ask you more formally someday if you'd think further about letting them take care of them permanently. So I'll just plant the seed.

On these different print jobs, would something like this Christmas greeting, which was from the year. . . . I'm not sure of the year.

CHENEY: I think at the bottom of it, that thing, it's about '35, I think, or thereabouts.

DOCTER: I see. It begins to have a little feeling of the miniature books, because it's set--what would that be, six-point?

CHENEY: I think that's ten-point Caslon.

DOCTER: Ten?

CHENEY: Yes, that was ten-point--it was ten-point Caslon Oldstyle. It was pretty small face.

DOCTER: It sure fooled me.

CHENEY: Well, that's why I got the eleven-point, because there's such a jump between ten-point and twelve-point Caslon.

DOCTER: I see. I see. But, in any case, the makeup of the page begins to have the feeling of a miniature book.

How did your first miniature come about?

CHENEY: Oh, I don't know, but it just happened..

DOCTER: What was the first one?

CHENEY: Type specimens, when I had the Pilot press in the basement here.

DOCTER: Right. And then that led to a whole series of miniature books.

CHENEY: Well, Glen Dawson then wanted a Gettysburg Address in miniature edition. Type specimen, type specimen. [searches for specimen] I don't know; it's somewhere in here. Anyway it was--no, that's the Gettysburg Address. That was done for Glen Dawson. Now here's the type specimen. No, that's another Gettysburg Address.

DOCTER: And what year was this Gettysburg Address?

CHENEY: Oh, back about '51, I think; or no, '49 or '50. Here's the first miniature that I made.

DOCTER: Oh, my. I haven't seen that one. I thought you were referring to a different book. I hadn't seen this.

CHENEY: Yes. Well, that was my first type specimen book, and that took Glen Dawson's eye; and then he wanted a Gettysburg Address in miniature like that.

DOCTER: This is March '49. What gave you the idea for this?

CHENEY: I don't know. It just happened. One experiments with this and that, and that developed.

DOCTER: Was Muir Dawson doing any printing at this time?

CHENEY: Yes. He got his Pilot press about a year before I did, and he got it along about '47, I think. Got mine in '48.

DOCTER: I got my Pilot press in 1953. It surely is one of the most practical presses, isn't it?

CHENEY: Yes, it is a good press. It's better than this press I have now. It's solider. For its size, you can get a very good impression on the Pilot.

DOCTER: In all, how many of these miniatures did you do?

CHENEY: How many miniature books? Oh, Lord, I suppose twenty-five or so, over the years.

DOCTER: Most of them for Dawson's.

CHENEY: Yes. A few of them just on my own, but mostly as jobs for Dawson.

DOCTER: Were they mostly Glen's idea?

CHENEY: Yes, Glen was the one that was interested, mainly. I've done two for Peggy Christian.

DOCTER: Was one of those the one that was the letter that had to do with the school board?

CHENEY: Yes, that's in this collection here.

DOCTER: What's the story of that letter? I've wondered because of my brother [Robert Docter] being on the school

board.

CHENEY: Peggy Christian just came into possession of it, somehow. She didn't know anything about Earl. Tried to get her to write a preface to it and give him some background. And she didn't know anything about him, except she just had the letter. And at that time--what's his name, Lummis?

DOCTER: Yes. Charles Lummis.

CHENEY: Yes. Well, he was on the--oh, what was he, was it the city council, or. . . ?

DOCTER: He was a librarian.

CHENEY: He was a librarian, but he had some connection with city government at that time. And he had the letter, and it was his handwriting on the outside of the letter that he was returning it to [C.N.] Earl again. The contents were noted, and he was returning it to Earl.

DOCTER: A most interesting piece. Now, who was this Peggy Christian?

CHENEY: Oh, she's a bookseller on La Cienega, about two doors south of Jake.

DOCTER: What became of the original?

CHENEY: Well, I guess she still has it, unless she sold it. The original is a pencil-written letter to the school board.

DOCTER: And it had to do with a man who was responding as

to why he didn't wish to run. Wasn't that it?

CHENEY: Yes, he didn't want to pay \$100 to run for a job that didn't pay anything.

DOCTER: Yes. [laughter]

CHENEY: It was a matter of conscience with him. He'd be handling money, and he said you couldn't trust people who'd buy their way into a nonpaying job. [laughter]

DOCTER: That's a funny letter.

CHENEY: That's it.

DOCTER: Yes. I'd better hand these back to you before I lose them. It's easy to lose these little ones, isn't it?

CHENEY: Yes, it is. You remember that letter from Gordon Williams? It's the smallest thing I did, and Grant lost the one that I gave him. Had to find another one for him.

DOCTER: Now, Gordon Williams was a former UCLA library man who went back to Chicago and who owned a handpress.

CHENEY: Yeah, he wrote a letter distinguishing between ravens and crows, and I printed that edition of it as a keepsake for the Rounce and Coffin. And those are easily lost, notwithstanding that Glen Dawson got hold of it. He charged about twenty-five dollars for one of those, something like that, because there were very few that got out into the public. It was printed for members of the R and C. Anyway, Grant promptly lost his, and I had to find

another one for him. I had one or two extras.

DOCTER: It's very interesting that this was distributed in 1966, and that was the year that I was not here in Los Angeles, because I don't think I've ever seen this. This is only about 1/2 inch x 3/4 inch.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: And bound. A beauty, really a beauty.

CHENEY: Thirty-point, I think it's thirty-point measure. That is, the line lengths--two and one-half pica.

DOCTER: Very exceptional piece of work. Must have been very difficult to bind.

CHENEY: Yes. Held it together with a paper clip while I was sewing it and gluing it and getting it into its cover.

DOCTER: Really an exception. Do you think the Rounce and Coffin Club will survive?

CHENEY: I don't know. You mean survive the women that are in it? [laughter] I haven't been to a meeting in two or three years. I don't know what goes on there now.

DOCTER: Well, of course, the old-timers, one by one, will become less active. [Lawrence Clark] Powell dropped out years ago, long before my time. I guess you would have been a member when he was still active in it.

CHENEY: Yes, I became a member in, oh, about December '49. Powell still came to at least half the meetings through the fifties. And Grant Dahlstrom used to come to every meeting;

I don't think he comes very often any more. Of course, Saul Marks is gone now. I guess Jake still attends meetings pretty well. [Ward] Ritchie seldom shows up.

DOCTER: Well, that's bound to change an organization, isn't it, when the old-timers fall by the wayside?

CHENEY: Yes. Well, it's changed its nature quite a bit, anyway. It's become a more or less serious club. It was sort of a carousing club when I first knew it. Members would just meet and then have a great time, and there was very seldom much discussion of the graphic arts.

DOCTER: It was more of a get-together.

CHENEY: Yes. But after the women began--but even before there were women members, they began to take over and decide where the meeting would be held, and so forth, and it lost its old character. Like that time that Beatrice Warde was a guest, and the club was going to hold the meeting at the Thistle Inn. And the women--wives of the members--wouldn't have that; it had to be out in Century City. A little more style. Since then, the club has never been the same.

DOCTER: I remember that meeting.

CHENEY: We used to meet--go down in the Good Fellows Grotto--that's where the twentieth anniversary was held--that was down on Main Street next to the Follies Theatre. It's been torn down since then. And then we went to that

French restaurant that's down near the Union Depot.

DOCTER: Taix's?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Was that it? T-a-i-x?

CHENEY: Yes, I think that's the name of it. I don't remember whether it was Taix's or Foix's, but it's the name of some French bread.

DOCTER: Oh, there's a place called Pierre down there.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: But that's more of a sandwich place, I think. I think you may mean Taix's. They serve coffee in a glass.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: And you eat family style. That place.

CHENEY: Yes. They had more than sandwiches. I know we had pea soup.

DOCTER: What was Powell like? Was he a friendly guy?

CHENEY: He was friendly when he was on social occasions; I don't know what he was like in business, in his work. But socially, he was friendly.

DOCTER: I've only had contact with him at sort of big meetings. Like he was at--remember when they had the big dinner to honor Ritchie, ten or fifteen years ago?

CHENEY: Yes, that was the Trogman episode.

DOCTER: That's right.

CHENEY: That's how they persuaded Trogman to stay there--because it was a dinner honoring Ritchie, and, apparently,

this particular chicken dish was a favorite of Ritchie's, or else it was something he'd thought up, so Trogman was persuaded to stay. I never did understand that, though--how one leg had brown meat, and the other leg had white meat on it. [laughter] I think one of the women explained that they weren't legs, really, that they wrapped the meat around the ends of these long--they were long bones, like that. It must have been like the leg of a crane. And each one had two; and one of them was all white meat, and the other was all brown meat.

DOCTER: Strange.

CHENEY: Finally got Trogman to eat a little of it by pouring salt on it. I told him that you could eat anything if you poured enough salt on it and kill it.

DOCTER: You know, Trogman has made a lot of money with these phototypesetter machines. Did you know that? He got off into importing these machines that use a negative on 35-millimeter film, and then they expose the sensitive paper with each letter. You can enlarge it to whatever size you want from the negative for a headliner. Did you know that he was in that business?

CHENEY: No, I knew that he was in something like that, but . . .

DOCTER: I think he's done pretty well at it. He puts out the machines as well as the negatives for different type-faces.

At one of the earlier meetings, say in the forties, of the Rounce and Coffin Club--what would it have been like? Did people just get together for social purposes, or would somebody give a little talk, or. . . ?

CHENEY: Yes, there were talks at those meetings sometimes. They had guests, but they were much more free and easy in those days. But there were different schools: those that wanted more seriousness and more purpose, and those that didn't. Even back in the forties there were disagreements among the members. Some of them would get dissatisfied and quit because it didn't seem to have enough purpose.

DOCTER: Social purposes weren't enough.

CHENEY: But, of course, there was the Western Books exhibit, that we sponsored, and, oh, I think that began back in the thirties.

DOCTER: Now, was [H. Richard] Archer the club secretary at that time?

CHENEY: He was both the secretary and treasurer. He was the only person we could get with enough devotion to it to do both jobs. And after he left, why, they had difficulty. It fell on [William F.] Eshelman--did you know Bill Eshelman?

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: And he couldn't handle it alone, so he and [Carey] Bliss handled it. One of them was secretary and the other

treasurer. And since then, they've had the two offices, because it's too much work for one man. Archer used to manage it by himself and he didn't seem to mind it.

DOCTER: He was the director of the Clark Library, wasn't he?

CHENEY: Yes, let's see, what did they--supervising bibliographer, I think they'd call it. Powell was the director at that time.

DOCTER: Oh, he was?

CHENEY: Yes. That's a different title. For instance, Conway's not the director now. He's the chief librarian. They used to call him supervising bibliographer, and they gave that name up and call him librarian now at the Clark. But Vosper is still the director.

DOCTER: But it doesn't seem fair because the director isn't really there directing anything.

CHENEY: No, but he has authority. Decisions have to be referred to him.

DOCTER: Is that right?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: I only met Archer once, so I don't know him at all. In fact, I met him at that Beatrice Warde meeting. I think he was out for a visit. Well, why did Archer leave the staff of the Clark Library?

CHENEY: Well, he and Powell had a few differences. He

wasn't getting ahead fast enough, and he didn't have his doctorate, and Powell wanted someone with a doctorate; and so Archer was moved out to UCLA. He was taken out of the Clark. I think that was Powell's working, and Archer didn't like that much. So he quit, and he went back to [R.H.] Donnelly [& Co.] in Chicago. He got a job as head librarian for Donnelly. And meanwhile, he went to school and got his doctorate while he was there, and then he became librarian of the--is it Chapping or Chapin Library at the Williams College?

DOCTER: Well, it must have been an awful hard decision for a person to give up his work out here in Southern California, friends within the Rounce and Coffin Club, and all this stuff. Was it quite a . . . ?

CHENEY: Well, I suppose he did have difficulty in that decision, but I think he was determined. And I think that Margot was more upset about it than he was. He was fed up with things. I think there was some politics going on that he didn't like, and he saw some of his associates being advanced beyond him, and so on.

DOCTER: Well, didn't it sometimes seem peculiar to have Powell sort of in an administrative authority and, at the same time, have these different social things that involved some of the members of the Rounce and Coffin Club that were part of Powell's own staff? I mean, did this create any awkwardness?

CHENEY: Well, I suppose there was some that went on among them. I don't know; it didn't show up in club meetings. I don't know. But I think that was one reason why Archer undertook to be both secretary and treasurer. He got credits for that--handling the Rounce and Coffin and handling the Western Books exhibit, and so on.

DOCTER: Did he handle all that?

CHENEY: Oh, yes, he handled all the business of the club at this time.

DOCTER: Tremendous responsibility. Well, did you ever know Powell very personally?

CHENEY: Well, I knew him. I met him at the club meetings, and then he'd drop in at my shop. And then, after I was over at the Clark, he used to stop by at my place every time he'd come over to the Clark. Talked to him a number of times. Never knew each other intimately.

DOCTER: He seems to be a brilliant writer. Have you seen the articles he's done for Westways recently, in the last two, three years?

CHENEY: Let's see, he wrote the one on Zeitlin, didn't he, that came out last year?

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: I read that one.

DOCTER: And then he's had a series that's been very successful on California authors, western authors--southwest

authors, I guess it is. It's just been a delight to read. He has such a talent for setting things down. Well, I guess when you get into administrative work, as he was in, it's inevitable--somewhere along the line, people get transferred, or somebody gets promoted before someone else, and it's hard to keep everybody happy. In general, has Powell been a person that the working librarians were happy with? Did they think of him as an SOB, or what?

CHENEY: Well, I imagine that they liked him. But I don't know from the inside. I haven't any connections with the library. I wouldn't know.

DOCTER: Well, he certainly achieved a great deal, didn't he? Serving, as he did, as the director of the library school, and so forth. And I guess Archer's had a pretty distinguished career also. And he's still printing, isn't he?

CHENEY: Yes. He printed me some stationery that he sent me last Christmas.

DOCTER: He did?

CHENEY: Yes. He designs, well, for festivals, plays, and so forth, that they do in Williamstown. I think he did programs and announcements and so forth for one of those plays, a Chekhov play, that was on public television. It was shown last night. I don't know whether you saw it or not. I forget the name of the play. It was filmed in

Williamstown, and the players first gave it there. He does programs for plays and various festivals and so forth that they have.

DOCTER: Let me come back to a couple of these printed pieces that you've kindly gotten out here. You mentioned that you probably would stick with Caslon if you were going to go out and buy a . . .

CHENEY: No, I think Baskerville.

DOCTER: I'm sorry, Baskerville, excuse me. When it comes to headlines and display faces, what do you think of in the selection of display faces? What strikes you, interests you?

CHENEY: Oh, I think the larger sizes of the text type that one uses, generally speaking.

DOCTER: And stick with it consistently.

CHENEY: Yes, I like that best. Use Baskerville capitals.

DOCTER: Are there any important differences between the Baskerville letters in the foundry type, which I think you still have--don't you?--and the monotype Baskerville? Are they identical?

CHENEY: No, I think the monotype is much closer to the original Baskerville. The foundry is actually a Fry face; Fry's Georgian, or some such name, but the foundry simply called it Baskerville.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: It's derived from Baskerville, but there's some differences.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: There's more contrast of thick and thin.

DOCTER: With the foundry.

CHENEY: Yes. It's a little weaker in the text sizes, a little bit spidery effect. But in the large capitals, it's more distinctive, and you get up to thirty-six and forty-eight point, it's a very rich face.

DOCTER: A more beautiful capital.

CHENEY: Yes. The foundry--both Stevenson-Blake and ATF have the same.

DOCTER: I think in the larger caps the thick and thins are a little more contrasty, aren't they?

CHENEY: Yes, but they're very rich. You get down to smaller sizes, and it's a little bit weak. You get down under fourteen-point and the foundry is weaker than the monotype.

DOCTER: Over the years, probably Glen Dawson has brought you as much work to do as anyone, hasn't he?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: These different books.

CHENEY: For that kind of work. Of course, I've done quite a bit of commercial work; especially when I was up on La Cienega, I did quite a bit.

DOCTER: What kind of commercial work? I think a lot of people don't realize that you've done that.

CHENEY: Just jobs as they come along--invoices and letter-heads and business cards.

DOCTER: The same kind of thing that I print.

CHENEY: Yes. And typesetting proofs for offsetters, for two or three offsetters up in that area. They got their typesetting from me.

DOCTER: It's curious that a lot of people--or perhaps I shouldn't say a lot of people, but often people that are interested in books forget that most printers do commercial printing. They're not just printing fine books. I think Dahlstrom still does a lot of straight commercial printing, doesn't he?

CHENEY: Oh, yes, that's where he makes his money. He doesn't make it off the books he does.

DOCTER: Would it be fair to say that Dahlstrom is one of the godfathers of fine printing in Southern California?

CHENEY: Well, yes, I think so. It depends on what period. For his time--oh, who was the printer that he apprenticed himself to? I can't think of the name, but. . . .

DOCTER: Dahlstrom?

CHENEY: [Bruce] McCallister was supposed to be the Los Angeles printer back in the twenties.

DOCTER: And Dahlstrom worked for McCallister, did he?

CHENEY: Yes. That's where he did his first work.

DOCTER: Is Dahlstrom from Southern California?

CHENEY: I think he came from Utah. Either Utah or Idaho, some Mormon clan.

DOCTER: Is he a Mormon?

CHENEY: No, but he was born a Mormon, and his was a Mormon family.

DOCTER: Oh.

CHENEY: Something like my wife. Mormonism's died out, but he came from Mormon stock.

DOCTER: I see. When you began your work in the early thirties, were you aware of Dahlstrom?

CHENEY: No, I didn't know him. Probably Stricker mentioned him. I know Stricker used to talk about Saul Marks a good deal, and he probably mentioned Dahlstrom, but I don't recall it.

DOCTER: Did you know Saul at that time?

CHENEY: No, I didn't. I didn't know any of these printers. Well, I'd met Ritchie once or twice during the thirties, but Stricker was really my only substantial contact with printing in the thirties.

DOCTER: And during the war years you weren't doing so much printing; you were out there working at Douglas.

CHENEY: I didn't do any then. I sold my press in 1941.

DOCTER: That's right.

CHENEY: Didn't get back into printing until '46 or '47.

DOCTER: So when did you first meet Dahlstrom?

CHENEY: Well, through Archer. I don't recall just how I met Archer. I think--oh, yes, Powell asked me for any Stricker items I had for the Stricker collection, and so I wrote a letter listing the things I had and asking what he wanted of those, and Powell just says to use all of them. I'd supposed that they'd want some of them and I could keep some collection. I sent them most of my Stricker items and kept out a very few. Anyway, when I wrote to Powell again, why, Archer answered me, and so I wrote an answer to Archer, and Reuben Pearson answered me. It went down the chain. I'd get a step down each time in my answer. Reuben Pearson was with the Clark Library at that time. He later went up to Pebble Beach--yes, Pebble Beach--and became a schoolteacher. Well, anyway, I went out to see Archer later, and he showed me around the library. So, I came to know him and met Dahlstrom through him. I gave them one of these announcements of the old Auk Press and glued it together so they couldn't see the insides, so they'd just see the outside there. Dahlstrom took it home and soaked it apart so that he could read the inside. I was just kind of embarrassed by the copy on the inside. I wouldn't be now, but I was at that time.

DOCTER: In what way were you embarrassed?

CHENEY: Oh, I don't know, I just thought it was foolishness, their talking about all these fine Qs, and ligature Qu's and whatnot, that I had, and a ligature gy, and I couldn't find any word except apology to use it in; so it just didn't seem like a businesslike announcement for job shops starting up.

DOCTER: Well, it's very typically Cheney.

CHENEY: Well, maybe that's what I wanted to hide. [laughter] Anyway, I glued the thing together. I thought that they could have that cover. So Dahlstrom took it home and soaked it, and opened it up.

DOCTER: I'll bet he was surprised.

CHENEY: Well, I don't know. I don't know whether it surprised him or not, but he was satisfied, anyway, to have it, so he could open it.

DOCTER: Is Dahlstrom a very good collector? Would he have hung onto that and cataloged it somehow?

CHENEY: I don't know whether he catalogs things, but he hangs onto things, except for the little Ravens and Crows that he lost.

DOCTER: Well, you could lose that on the way home. How about [Ed] Carpenter? Carpenter have a copy of this?

CHENEY: I don't know what Carpenter has. He has things you'd think he never would have, that he finds somewhere or other. You throw things away, and somehow they wind

up in Carpenter's hands. He either comes and hunts under tables and on the floor and in wastebaskets, or other people do it for him. But, anyway, he possesses many things that one had thought would have been disposed of.

DOCTER: He must have one of the finest private collections of ephemera.

CHENEY: He has things that no one else would collect--spoiled sheets that are dropped on the floor and been stepped on. They have a shoe mark on them. Somehow they were left there and Carpenter finds them.

DOCTER: I told you about that tympan paper I gave him.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: He liked that.

CHENEY: Well, those things, taken singly, they're just trash, but I suppose if you have a collection of them they have a value.

DOCTER: Yes. Come to think of it, I've never heard of anyone collecting tympan paper. It's a good idea, good idea. What did you do with the linoleum block for this?

CHENEY: Oh, it disappeared somewhere or other.

DOCTER: Really.

CHENEY: Probably threw it in, I was so eager to get rid of everything connected with that press when I sold it in 1941. I think I just threw in the blocks and cuts

that I had, along with all the types and initials and Cleland ornaments and everything else.

DOCTER: Well, why did you want to get rid of it?

CHENEY: Oh, I was tired of it and didn't want to think about it. I didn't think I'd ever go back to printing again.

DOCTER: You sold it for just a few dollars.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Twenty-five dollars?

CHENEY: Twenty-five or thirty-five, I forget which it was. It included the press, and type stand, and the cases, and all the type. I just threw away all the cuts, and so on. The fellow that bought it wouldn't have cared for those things, anyway. He was rather disappointed anyway; he said, "Don't you have any of this type and of that type?" Thinking of certain job faces that were popular at the time. He got all this Caslon Oldstyle, including that eleven-point Caslon and all the pothook s's that it had with it. French and German accents. It was just useless to him. He just wanted a press where he could do cards and so on. But at that time, I wasn't reasoning that way; I just wanted to get rid of it all, be done with it and not have to think about it.

DOCTER: Ever hear of the guy again?

CHENEY: No. At the time I started collecting type again, along in '48, I tried to think of his name. It seemed to

me his name was Wright, probably, but there were so many Wrights, and I couldn't remember his first name, so it was no use trying to find him again. I thought perhaps I could get back my Cleland ornaments and a few things like that if he still had them. But I had no address for him, and I wasn't sure of his last name; I didn't know his first name, and there are about five pages of Wrights in the phone book. I gave up on that.

DOCTER: When did you first come across Saul and Lillian's work?

CHENEY: Oh, I suppose I was shown it by Archer when I was visiting out at the Clark. And then, after I became a member of the Rounce and Coffin, of course, I met Saul. I don't know just when I first examined his work. I worked for Saul in 1950 for about six weeks.

DOCTER: Six weeks.

CHENEY: Yes. Joe Simon told me that's about what most people lasted with Saul, is six weeks.

DOCTER: How come?

CHENEY: Well, I don't know. With the particular job that he was working on at that time, anyway--I finished my work on that. They were going away to Europe at that time. Anyway, they dispensed with me. I don't know whether they'd intended that I stay longer, or whether I intended to stay longer, or whatnot, but, anyway, he was working on, oh, one

of the Southern California travel series for Dawson. I made up the page forms and printed some of them. They were set on monotype. Lillian did the monotype composition.

DOCTER: Well, did he actually come to you and say, "Will, we're going to have to let you go; we can't afford to keep you"?

CHENEY: Well, in effect, yes. He called me up after I went home one night. We parted good friends and were discussing music. He was asking me whether I liked chamber music, and we discussed that for a while, and I went home. And then, later in the evening he called up and said that he thought probably my Pilot press was getting rusty, the press I had in the basement--I hadn't used it enough--and asked me if I didn't want to go back to working on my Pilot press. Well, I didn't expect it to last very long, anyway, there. It's just a little family business. They have to schedule their work according to what they have.

DOCTER: But surely, most certainly, you would have been helpful to them. Knowing how to handle type, and. . . .

CHENEY: I didn't do much handling type. I made up pages and locked them up and did press work, but there wasn't much type work to do.

DOCTER: What was it like to work for Saul? What was he

like when he was at work?

CHENEY: Well, he was never in a hurry--fussy but leisurely.

DOCTER: Too fussy?

CHENEY: No, not too fussy. Fussy isn't quite the word. He was particular. Very particular about impression and inking and just the color of the ink--sometimes the press would be washed up and reinked five or six times before you could start on a job. Quite particular about his work, and about make-ready. Studying the back of the sheet from all angles, and various lights to see if the impression was exact everywhere. He told me a story of when he and Grant were working on something years before. They were studying the back of the sheet, and Grant kept insisting it needed more impression right here, it needed just a little more attention here. And Saul said, no, it didn't. They argued and argued about it, and finally they turned it over to see how it was printing up on the other side, and it was a blank place. There wasn't supposed to be any type there. So that settled the argument about whether they should put more tissue on at that point. But Grant could see at a glance that it wasn't getting enough impression there, and Saul thought it was getting enough.

DOCTER: Oh, that's funny. Must have been something to see the two of them work on a job together.

CHENEY: Well, they had their difficulties. Ward Ritchie and Saul always had difficulty about who had lent what type to which and why they didn't get it back. Saul had acquired some type that Stricker had had, the Stationers script, or something such, and Ritchie wanted to use it. So Saul lent it to Ritchie, and according to Saul's account, that was the last anyone ever saw of it; it was several years before, and Saul never got it back. Then later, a year or so after I'd worked for Saul, Saul called up and wanted to know whether I had any fists. He said he never stocked those things, because he didn't like them. And so I sent him a selection of fists.

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FEBRUARY 11, 1975

DOCTER: When we were just concluding our discussion last time, I think you had mentioned that there was a time when Saul had loaned something to Ward Ritchie, some type, and then complained that Ward had never given it back. And you mentioned that you had been asked to loan some fists to Saul. Maybe you could explain the conclusion of that story.

CHENEY: Well, there's not much story to it. It was a little collection of fists. I made up a pair of each size and of each style and mailed them over to him, and that's the last I ever saw or heard of them. They just disappeared. But that happens whenever you lend out type; you don't see it again. The most honest printers will mislay it and forget it; that's all there is to that story. That was the end of those fists.

DOCTER: One of the things that I was thinking over after I left was, you mentioned that you had worked for Saul for about six weeks.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: And then that he called you in the evening and said he wasn't going to use you anymore.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Now, it seems peculiar that he would call you.

Why didn't he just chat with you about it, or something?

CHENEY: Oh, I don't know that he'd made up his mind at the time that I was still there, or not. We were discussing --just before I left, he asked me whether I liked chamber music, and I said, yes, I enjoyed it. And he said, "Well, we sometimes have little musicales here, and some night maybe you'd like to come over to one of them." And that was the last that was said. And then in the evening he called me up and asked me if my press was getting rusty. It was a little Pilot I had in the basement, and wasn't using it, now it must be getting rusty. And then he suggested he couldn't use me anymore there.

DOCTER: Was Saul at times having difficulty making ends meet?

CHENEY: Well, I think almost always--it was a little operation, and he wasn't an efficient businessman; he was a craftsman rather than a businessman. I think probably Lillian had more hand in the business, had more business acumen, than he.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: But they were always running from week to week. And collections were slow, and they couldn't buy paper, and so on.

DOCTER: Would collections often be a problem?

CHENEY: Well, they always are. The little collections,

with individuals, aren't so bad; but with businesses, he did a good deal of work for typographers, that is, ad agencies (he provided the typography), and that was always slow pay.

DOCTER: What work did he have you do while you were there?

CHENEY: Well, press work, and odd jobs that he wanted done while he was working on, oh, one of the California travel series, somebody's journal. They went across the plains to San Diego. I've forgotten the exact title. He was working on that, and he had me doing job work and molding the pigs for the monotype and all sorts of odd things.

DOCTER: Well, he probably really needed an extra person, didn't he?

CHENEY: He did for a while. But they were cleaning up all their work and getting it out of the way. They were going to take a trip to Europe. They went to Paris. I think they stayed a month or so at that time.

DOCTER: Oh, yes. This would have been in the fifties, was it?

CHENEY: Spring of '50. I think they went about in May of '50, and I was there along in March--March and April, somewhere in there.

DOCTER: I once heard it said that Saul sold his press in order to make that trip. Do you know if that's a true story or not?

CHENEY: He may have sold one after I left there. His main press at that time was a Laureate, which was like the Colt's Armory, only larger. And since then he's had several different presses. But I think that Laureate disappeared. And he had a German-model press of the same general sort later.

DOCTER: You mentioned when we were talking last that frequently people would only work for Saul for maybe four, five, six weeks--something to that effect.

CHENEY: I got that from Joe Simon. He asked me how long my job had lasted, and I said about six weeks. And he said, "Well, that's the usual. That's about the maximum."

DOCTER: What did he mean?

CHENEY: Well, for one reason or another, the jobs didn't last long. Either they weren't satisfactory to Saul or there was just so much work. For whatever reason, jobs just didn't last. Saul complimented me on the way I fed the Laureate; that whenever I threw it off (you know how those things throw off), as the platen is descending, I'd pull it off, and it didn't make a lot of clatter. He said the last pressman he had there would throw it off fast when it was going up, and clear down on the street below, which is about a quarter of a block away (if you've seen Saul's place, there, you go down all those stairs to the street), you could hear it clear down on the street, as he

fought with the press. [laughter]

DOCTER: That's funny. He appreciated a little quiet technique. . . ?

CHENEY: Yes, well, I never got impatient with the press. Some pressmen, you know, get impatient and slam the throw out and slam around. And I was never impatient, because I was never in a hurry. I didn't care how long a job took. Of course, that was--I don't know whether that was a recommendation to Lillian. She was rather efficient, and she doesn't like a job to take too long.

DOCTER: I see. When I was getting some training from Saul in that course that he had on the art of the book over at USC, we spent quite a bit of time around this one Albion handpress that he'd gotten from England. And I got the impression that Saul was a poor mechanic. Did you have any opportunity to see his mechanical aptitude?

CHENEY: Well, we never did repair work when I was there, but I would think that he wasn't much of a judge of a mechanic, because when he saw a few of the things I did--locking up the form and so forth--he said, "You're a good mechanic." And I'm about the poorest mechanic I know of. I can do things where I've learned the routine, but I have no mechanical inventiveness; I can't figure out anything. Once I've learned the rote, I can do something. But he commended me on being a good mechanic, and if I

looked like a good mechanic to him, why, then he's not much of a judge.

DOCTER: Was Saul a person to give many compliments?

CHENEY: Oh, yes. He was very polite--courteous is perhaps a better word. He is a courteous man. Or was.

DOCTER: What would a typical day have been like, then? This was, of course, before he built a little studio on the back of his house, which he later did. He had his handpress and so on out there. You would have been underneath the house, on the first floor, in the front.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: What would it have been like in a typical day there? What time would you begin? What time did he begin?

CHENEY: Theoretically, after breakfast, I suppose, but he was rather leisurely. I started when I got there. Left here and went on the streetcar and bus to Vermont and Santa Monica and then walked from there, about a mile or so from Vermont and Santa Monica. I think I got there about eight-thirty to nine, in between eight-thirty and--not a regular time, but around in there. And then we'd start, and sometimes there were long discussions before we'd start. Discussing things in general.

DOCTER: No pressure.

CHENEY: No, there was no atmosphere of pressure. And he had a swing chair out in his front yard, and he used to go

out there and swing and read his mail during the day, at any time. Sometimes there was just nothing went on, and other times there was the pressure of work, but it never seemed to hurry him any.

DOCTER: And Lillian? What was Lillian like in the shop?

CHENEY: Well, she was a little more matter-of-fact than Saul, but she was pleasant enough. She wouldn't hurry you.

DOCTER: Was there ever any unpleasantness?

CHENEY: Not while I was there, except that the kids were both in. The boys [Byron and Fred] were both young at that time, and one of them was up in his room in the house and refused to come out, and the other one was in the front yard and threw mud clods up at the window and mud all over the house. Lillian went out and scolded him for it; she wasn't interested in which kid was right in the argument, but she didn't like throwing mud at the house. And Saul just very quietly stayed in the shop and went on with his work. That was the nearest to unpleasantness, and that was just a normal kid-parent relationship.

DOCTER: Who would really run things, in terms of getting the job processed? Would Lillian sort of organize and push it, or would Saul be the pusher, or nobody?

CHENEY: Well, Saul was a designer and planner. Lillian did the monotype typing, cutting the strip. Saul did the casting. And Lillian did the bookkeeping.

DOCTER: Did Lillian ever set any type?

CHENEY: Oh, yes, but generally their text was set monotype, you know. The only hand-set type would be headings and titles and some job work. But she was a competent craftsman and typesetter. They'd worked together for years.

DOCTER: How about getting a job locked up and onto a press? Could Lillian do that?

CHENEY: Well, I suppose she could lock it up. Probably wouldn't have been allowed to put it on the press, because-- I don't know, there's probably been a change in the law now --at that time, women weren't allowed to put a chase into a press.

DOCTER: Being so heavy?

CHENEY: Yes. Because usually they ran over twenty-five pounds. Especially this chase. And the Laureate would-- the type in it would run at least fifty pounds. Anyway, they could operate a press but not put the chase in.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: That was a rule, I remember, when I was at the Artesia News. They had a woman press-feeder there, and she couldn't even put a card job in the press because there was just a general rule that they couldn't lift a chase into the press.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: Also, they couldn't operate a hand paper cutter. They could operate a power paper cutter, provided they'd get some schoolboy or something to put the paper down for them. They couldn't take a lift of paper and put it on the paper cutter, but they could operate a power cutter.

DOCTER: Maybe Women's Lib has changed that.

CHENEY: It probably has, you know. At least I've heard that in industry they no longer have to have two women, one on each end, if something weighs more than twenty-five pounds. I remember at Douglas seeing these big farm girls looking disgusted as they carried a strip of aluminum, one on each end. Either one of them could have carried it in one hand, but they weren't allowed to.

DOCTER: I see. Did either Fred or Byron Marks work in the shop when you were there?

CHENEY: Well, not at that time. Later they did. I know when I went back later to get some type for a job that I printed, and Saul set the type, the monotype, Byron was there handling things at that time.

DOCTER: Byron was?

CHENEY: Yes. That was several years later. He was just a high school boy at the time I was there.

DOCTER: I see. Would you say that you were a friend of Saul's or just a passing acquaintance, or that it was more of a business relationship, or how close were you to Saul?

CHENEY: Well, that's an indefinite sort of thing. I'd known him since--well, for twenty-five years or so. Met him in the Rounce and Coffin, along about '49, and then this work for him was in 1950, and then I met him at least two or three times a year since then, up till he died, so it's about twenty-five years or so. Never been an intimate associate, but more than an acquaintance, somewhere between an acquaintance and an intimate friend.

DOCTER: Do you think of Saul as different from other printers?

CHENEY: Well, you mean as an individual, having an individual style? Yes, he's different; he's very different, for instance, from Grant. Saul is an ornamentalist, and Grant doesn't care so much for that. At least, in my time, when I thought about it more, why, Saul's impression--his impression's heavy, but his inking's very light. He likes a gray page. And Grant is usually full color. (For the convenience of this mouthpiece here, Grant means Grant Dahlstrom, and the Castle Press.) Saul has his individualities. His work you recognize at once. Sometimes you wouldn't know whether Ritchie or [Gordon] Holmquist or Dahlstrom printed something unless you examined it carefully and figured out. But you'd know right away any of Saul's work--you know that elaborate border, and the ornamented facs, hand-constructed initials, letters built

up of small pieces, and so on. Yeah, he has an individual style.

DOCTER: Do you think there were any important weaknesses in his design?

CHENEY: Well, that's taste. You're asking me, who is not an ornamentalist. I would say it's a weakness; to me it's overdone. I don't care for those elaborate borders and borders around every page of the book, but that's not a weakness, that's a question of taste. But he's generally considered the best printer of the Los Angeles area, and some think that he's the best in the West, or disputes the title with Grabhorn.

DOCTER: How would you compare [Edwin] Grabhorn and Marks?

CHENEY: Oh, Lord, I shouldn't have brought that up. I don't know, they both like--Grabhorn, though, really chewed up the paper. He really gave it an impression.

DOCTER: Probably used a real hard backing?

CHENEY: Well, of course, he used moistened paper and then gave it a very firm impression, and that will impress, and it gives an effect of embossing, you know. But he really gave it a heavy impression. But, well, I don't know what to say. Grabhorn is not the ornamentalist that Saul is.

DOCTER: Well, don't you sometimes print on wet paper? Dampen the paper?

CHENEY: Well, I would if I wanted to go to that trouble,

but I've never gone in for that.

DOCTER: Never found it essential.

CHENEY: No. It might have improved things if I had, but I usually used ordinary papers, pulp paper. I didn't use handmade all rags. It wouldn't be worthwhile to moisten the ordinary book papers.

DOCTER: I once got into a big problem trying to moisten some Curtis rag. It didn't take the water evenly at all. I guess it must have had some kind of sizing on the surface of it. Caused me a terrible problem.

CHENEY: Well, did you press the stack of paper?

DOCTER: Yes. But it just didn't seem to absorb the water in an even surface across the paper. I haven't done too much of that since.

CHENEY: I've kept paper in a humidor--made a little humidor out of an old breadbox and put a little table in it and kept a dish of water under that. Keep the box closed for a while, and the air's wet enough in there that it moistens the paper, and that makes it a little easier to print small type on rather hard paper.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: Just have it moist. The same effect that you'd get in printing in rainy weather--you know, it's much easier to print in rainy weather than in dry weather.

DOCTER: I didn't know that.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: That's an interesting idea.

CHENEY: No, paper's soft in moist weather, and for one thing, it lies flat; you know, in dry weather your paper curls up on you, and it resists impression more when it's dry. But this humidor would give the same effect as moist weather. It wouldn't be dampening the paper but just moistening it slightly.

DOCTER: How many sheets could you put in that little humidor?

CHENEY: Well, for the small things that I did, the miniature books and so forth, you can put stacks in. You see, this was a box, maybe about a foot high; and the little table with the dish under it would stand maybe three to four inches high and, oh, about ten inches long, and six inches across this little table. For small sheets, such as I used on those miniature books, you could have several stacks of paper ahead for two or three runs.

DOCTER: And the idea would be to leave it in there for several days at a time.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: Or maybe permanently.

CHENEY: Well, while I was working, until I'd printed both sides.

DOCTER: I see. That's a good trick to know.

CHENEY: Well, one day doesn't do much of any good. Of

course, if your humidor's already moist, it'll moisten up pretty fast, but it takes a certain amount of time and water to moisten the inside of the humidor.

DOCTER: Right. When you mention that Grant, for example, is not an ornamentalist, and that he likes to get, as you say, full color, I guess you mean full inking.

CHENEY: Yes. Yes, that's one thing Saul impressed on me. When you say color--of course, I knew that already, but I hadn't thought much about it--but Saul said when you say color, you mean what the inking is; a light color, or a dark color means light black or full black or heavy black. Of course, if you say colored inks, why, then you're referring to actual color; but when you speak of ink color, why, you mean the amount of ink that you're using.

DOCTER: Well, in any case, would there be any important design differences, in addition to those that you've mentioned, that would differentiate Dahlstrom and some others from Saul Marks? I think you've mentioned ornamentation and inking. What about impression? Would Grant use as strong an impression or any different kind of packing than Saul would?

CHENEY: Well, of course, in my time, Grant didn't do his own printing. He had his pressmen do his work, but I'd say it was--he didn't bite in like Saul's. Saul's you could always feel on the other side of the page. Grant is

more of a professional--competent, professional work.

DOCTER: What kind of packing would Saul use on a typical job, do you remember, when you were doing some of that press work?

CHENEY: Hard packing, as little as possible. That is, set the press in--the platen impression high. Use as little packing as possible. And he used acetate pressboard, because it's a very hard surface. I think I gave you some of that, transparent pressboard. Because that's a harder surface than this fiber pressboard.

DOCTER: Yes, I think in the old days they used to use that red fiber pressboard a lot, didn't they?

CHENEY: Yes. They still do.

DOCTER: Oh, do they?

CHENEY: Yes. That is, for letterpress. Anybody that prints--if there's anyone left that prints letterpress, why, they still use it. It's the customary pressboard.

DOCTER: Well, let me ask this: In order to get a hard packing, would you put the acetate directly behind the tympan paper?

CHENEY: You do when you're ready to go. First you have it underneath, and you have your tympan and your draw sheet (your draw sheet is the top sheet), until you've got your impression and tissue up your make-ready sheet. Then you put that on the sheet below the draw sheet; after you're ready to go and have your pins set--because you want to set

your pins and see that they're down tight before you put your pressboard under the top sheet; otherwise you dent it. But when you're all ready to go, then you move your tympan packing above the make-ready sheet, which was the pressboard on top, right under the . . .

DOCTER: Right under the tympan?

CHENEY: Right under the draw sheet, yeah.

DOCTER: Hmm.

CHENEY: That's supposed to give the firmest and clearest impression and also save your type, because it's a square, flat impression; whereas if there's any softness, why, the type sinks in and the edges of the type wear off.

DOCTER: Um-hmm.

CHENEY: Wear round.

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: However, there is a soft tympan school. Stricker belonged to that. He'd start with a rubber blanket and build up. His idea was that you got a better impression by just sinking the type into a nice soft tympan.

DOCTER: Oh.

CHENEY: It seemed to work with him. He got a pretty good impression.

DOCTER: Yes. Those samples you showed me last week.

CHENEY: But Saul belonged to the hard tympan school, and so I asked Dahlstrom for a comment on that. He said, hard

tympan by all means. And there are those that say that they use a hard tympan for type, but for--what do you call these reproductions of photographs?

DOCTER: Half-tones?

CHENEY: Yes. Half-tones. For half-tones you use a soft tympan. Most of the commercial printers seem to believe that, but Dahlstrom doesn't. I asked him about half-tones, and he says it doesn't matter what you're printing; use a hard tympan. There are different views on these questions.

DOCTER: Grant Dahlstrom seems to be something of a father figure. Everyone at some time seems to have been influenced somewhat by him. Was he important at all in helping you get started? Did you know him at all at the beginning?

CHENEY: Well, Archer introduced me to him. I worked for a month or so for Dahlstrom, long before I worked for Saul. But I helped in producing his Sacramento book. I made up the forms on that, made up the pages. That was linotype-set, and oh, let's see, what was it, a 40-em measure, I believe; and two 20-em slugs had to be butted, and they had to be sawed to fit them together. And then the pages made up, and Grant was very fussy that there be no widow pages. It meant sometimes leading out and sometimes not leading, and so on, to make these lines fit and get the illustrations in.

DOCTER: Now, the definition of a widow page would be a page that ends with a hyphen?

CHENEY: No, it's a page that has a widowed line at the top. That is . . .

DOCTER: . . . incomplete?

CHENEY: . . . an incomplete line at the top. Then sometimes they'd speak of the last line of a paragraph anywhere on a page was one three-letter word, or something like that, they considered a widowed line. But generally it means the short, first line at the top of a page. And those upset Dahlstrom.

DOCTER: What was Grant like to work with?

CHENEY: Well, I don't know, he was all right. He's businesslike in his work; he's very easygoing in social matters, but he's rather businesslike. You had to keep going. I think they had only a half-hour lunch. Didn't dawdle over their--with Saul Marks, it was dawdling all day long. He dawdled, and the people that worked for him dawdled, but there was none of that at Dahlstrom's. Of course, it's a commercial press, the Castle Press. People were kept at work. And the compositors, in my time, didn't have any stools to sit on; they were expected to stand, which is the old practice--that you're supposed to stand at the case, at the working bank. I had a high stool and a low stool--a high stool to work up in the working bank

and a low stool for working the cases, lower down the stand. And Grant said, "What do you want those for? Supposed to stand to work." Which you are. You can work faster if you stand, but you can enjoy it more if you sit down.

DOCTER: Yes. I agree.

CHENEY: But the thing was, there was nowhere to sit down anywhere in his shop, unless you went back and sat on the packing cases and the paper. That sort of thing. People had to hunt around for places when they ate their lunch.

DOCTER: No extra chairs.

CHENEY: No, there were no chairs in the shop. And you had to find a place to sit--sit up on a table or something of that sort.

DOCTER: A little earlier you mentioned Joe Simon. He's the brother of Lillian Marks, isn't he?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: And he's now running Ward Ritchie's establishment, I think, isn't he?

CHENEY: Well, I suppose he is, if Ward Ritchie's retired from it. I don't know what happened there, but he was a partner with Ritchie.

DOCTER: Well, is it true that there was a falling-out between Joe Simon and Saul and Lillian in some way?

CHENEY: I wouldn't know about that, except that I don't

think that Saul and Simon liked each other much; I suppose just brother-in-law antagonism. I don't know. I really don't know much of the gossip about. . . .

DOCTER: Is Simon much of a printer?

CHENEY: Well, he's the manager at Ritchie and Simon. I don't know how much he does himself, except that I've seen in books, "This bibliography is printed by Ward Ritchie Press and designed by Joseph Simon." But personally I don't know. I've never seen him at work. Don't know just how he works.

DOCTER: What about Ward Ritchie? Have you ever had the opportunity to do any work with Ward Ritchie, directly?

CHENEY: No. Just talked to him. He's the first one of that group I knew. I met him back in the thirties.

DOCTER: Oh.

CHENEY: Well, mainly through Stricker, I suppose. At any rate, Ward Ritchie came over and saw my press when I was over there on Allison Avenue--that first press I had. Just looked at it and said it was a pretty good setup, he thought. And that's about all that happened during the thirties with Ward Ritchie.

DOCTER: Does his printing seem clearly distinguishable in any ways from Saul Marks or Grant Dahlstrom or others?

CHENEY: I suppose so. I couldn't say just how. I think I'd know the difference, but I can't pinpoint just how I

would. You could tell how you would know Saul's printing from anyone else's, but, oh, I think Ritchie's is a little more open, light and open, than Dahlstrom's. But then they've done so many things, so many different kinds of things, in all the styles. After all, the Castle Press and Ward Ritchie Press are commercial presses, and they do work in almost any style.

DOCTER: Right.

CHENEY: And their subordinates have charge of much of the work. But I don't know that you could tell a Ritchie Press item, necessarily.

DOCTER: After you've mentioned men like Saul Marks, Saul and Lillian Marks and Ward Ritchie and Grant Dahlstrom and Stricker, what other people do you think of as distinguished printers in Southern California?

CHENEY: Well, of course, there was Holmquist.

DOCTER: Gordon Holmquist.

CHENEY: Yes. Gordon Holmquist.

DOCTER: Who was he?

CHENEY: He was a printer down there on Eleventh or Twelfth Street and Flower, somewhere down in there. It was the Cole-Holmquist Press; and I don't know who Cole was, but it was called the Cole-Holmquist Press. And he was a member of Rounce and Coffin. And he and [Richard] Hoffman [the College Press] represented the ultraconservative faction in the

Rounce and Coffin Club. [laughter]

DOCTER: What was that? [laughter]

CHENEY: The time when most of the others seemed to be liberals, why, they upheld the conservative side.

DOCTER: You mean on political topics?

CHENEY: Well, yes. And I suppose that they were cultural conservatives, I didn't know. But anyway, they used to hang out together, against the rest of them. That's about all I know about Holmquist. But I used to meet him at the Rounce and Coffin meetings. He was more a businessman type, large and stout and cigar-smoking. It hasn't much to do with printing, but that was his type. And the Ward Ritchie type, and the Dahlstrom type, and the Saul Marks type--they're all distinct.

DOCTER: Well, besides Holmquist, are there others?

CHENEY: Are you speaking of commercial printers, or private printers, or. . . ?

DOCTER: Well, just as many names as come to mind. So far we've talked about Marks a little, Dahlstrom, Ritchie, Holmquist.

CHENEY: The time when I first knew Stricker, the names that Stricker would mention, that were known around Los Angeles, were McCallister--Bruce McCallister and Fred Lang were the prominent names of printers.

DOCTER: I guess throughout the twenties and the early

thirties. Were they in a partnership?

CHENEY: No, I think they were separate.

DOCTER: Especially McCallister, I think, had quite a reputation for fine printing.

CHENEY: Yes, Grant served his apprenticeship with McCallister.

DOCTER: Well, there's quite an interesting tradition there, isn't there? McCallister, Dahlstrom. Dahlstrom had a little influence on Saul Marks, I guess, in the early years. At least, judging by some of those remarks at his funeral.

CHENEY: Yes, they worked together some of the time.

DOCTER: What about Dick Hoffman?

CHENEY: Well, I don't know much about him. He's been connected with UC, or whatever you call it--City College [and California State University, Los Angeles]--in the time that I've known him. And that's all I know about him.

DOCTER: Do you have any comments about his style?

CHENEY: I really don't know enough to--see, he seems to be one that they can fall back on to do Rounce and Coffin printing or printing for the Clark Library and so on. If they can't get anyone else, why, Hoffman'll come through. But I don't know; I haven't examined his work enough to know about what his style is. You ask these questions about the style of this person and that person, and I'm really such a self-centered person that I don't think much about other people's style.

DOCTER: What about your own style?

CHENEY: Well, I led myself into that one, didn't I?

What is my style? I don't know. If you tell me what it is, why, I'll tell you what about it.

DOCTER: Well, I suppose you're the foremost designer and printer of miniature books in the world, aren't you?

CHENEY: Well, no, there are others. I think that fellow back in New England somewhere [Worcester, Mass.]--what's his name?--Achille J. St. Onge, I think his name is. He publishes, oh, dozens a year. Of course he has them done; he farms them out.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: Has them done by presses in Holland, and so on. I think he produces the most.

DOCTER: He's a bookseller, is he?

CHENEY: Yes, he sells them.

DOCTER: But do you think it's fair to say that for actually doing the entire job of producing the book, that you would be number one in terms of productivity of miniature books?

CHENEY: Well, I suppose, in my time, along about mid-sixties and in there, when I was doing three or four a year, why, I would probably be the most productive. And more have come in since then. More printers--like Pall Bohne is doing at least one, sometimes two a year. Audrey Arellanes does one or two a year. And then there are

others coming in. Vance Gerry is producing miniatures now, and he seems to be very competent, from what I've seen of his work, does very good work.

DOCTER: I think he uses a Miehle Vertical. Perhaps he has some other presses, too.

CHENEY: Yes. I don't know what he uses, but I've just seen the sheets on one that he's doing, and it's very good work--composition, page design, and so on.

DOCTER: When you were doing the miniatures for Glen Dawson in the mid-sixties, how much would he pay for a typical book?

CHENEY: Well, he always paid what I asked for it, and I don't know whether my prices were standard or not. But sometimes he'd make it a little higher. If I'd ask eighty dollars, why, he'd say, "It's worth a hundred." But of course, if you do the binding yourself, I guess you charge more. With these cloth- and leather-bound books, why, he had them done by Bela Blau. I didn't bind anything, except if it's paper covers.

DOCTER: Now, how long would it take you--how many days of work would it take to do the printing for a small book? Would you take, say, a month, typically, or two months or just a matter of a couple of weeks or. . . ?

CHENEY: Well, I suppose a month to six weeks. I could have done it if I'd worked only on that. Depends on how

many pages, and so on, but I probably could have done it in a week or two weeks if I worked intensively on it. But I had so many other things to do--job work, and work for the Clark Library, and so on. Of course, working on one press, it's a nuisance to get your form set up, and you remember just what impression, and so on, that you're using, and then you have to stop and do something else, and it's practically beginning all over again. Because the make-ready and the press work are different with different kinds of jobs.

DOCTER: Right. That's what takes the time.

CHENEY: If I'd had more than one press, that would have been easier.

DOCTER: Would you usually print maybe 100 copies or 50 or 200? How many copies would be a typical run, and who decided that?

CHENEY: Well, usually the publisher decides how many he wants. Glen Dawson--he usually would want 200, sometimes 250 or 300.

DOCTER: I see. Did he leave you completely on your own to design them?

CHENEY: Yes, generally speaking.

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FEBRUARY 11, 1975

DOCTER: At the time that the tape ran out, what were we talking about, Will?

CHENEY: Something about miniatures, and how many Glen Dawson wanted, and . . .

DOCTER: Oh, sure. That's right. And how much influence he would have on the actual design. Or whether he would just leave you on your own.

CHENEY: Yes. Well, I'd submit proofs. I'd design a title page and send it to him, and set up some pages and send him proofs on the first few pages to see how he liked them. And he was generally satisfied. If I'd send him two or three title pages, optional title pages, why, he'd usually select one of them he liked better. But otherwise, I was pretty much on my own.

DOCTER: Glen and Muir [Dawson] seem to be very different kinds of people to me. Quite different personalities. How would you describe Glen?

CHENEY: Oh, gosh, how would I describe him? I don't know, but he's the one who's--miniatures are his baby, and--oh, hum. I don't know how to describe him.

DOCTER: Is he like his father?

CHENEY: No, Muir is like his father, looks like his father.

DOCTER: Oh?

CHENEY: I think he's more like his father--in disposition. Also in deafness: they're both deaf, or hard of hearing, I guess is the word. They're not completely deaf, but they're both hard of hearing.

DOCTER: I see.

CHENEY: Whereas, according to Ellen Shaffer, Glen can hear a pin drop from one end of the store to the other. So he's different in that respect.

DOCTER: Is Glen a friendly person?

CHENEY: Oh, he's always been friendly to me. Some people like Muir very much and don't care so much for Glen. I've heard some people say they don't like Glen, that he sort of grates on them, but I've never seen it that way; he's always seemed friendly to me. I think he's a little more aggressive than Muir.

DOCTER: Is he?

CHENEY: Yes. But then, aggressiveness in itself is not a bad thing. Depends on how it happens to rub you.

DOCTER: Is he the businessman of the two? I mean, does he push the business end of it, more than Muir?

CHENEY: I suppose so, but I think Muir's just apparently not so businesslike. I think he actually is probably a pretty sound businessman. Just as his father was. In fact, he probably is less likely to have, well, ideas to try out than Glen is. Glen is more apt to go off on some

idea of a project, like these various things--the California travels, and the Baja California series, and the miniature books, and so forth--are. . . .

DOCTER: The law series?

CHENEY: Yes. Those are Glen's ideas, and they're not necessarily profitable; oh, I think they cover expenses, but I don't think they advance the business much.

DOCTER: Really? They're more scholarly contributions, I guess you'd have to say.

CHENEY: Well, indirectly they'd advance the business, because they'd become known--Dawson's would become known as a publisher of these projects.

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: But that sort of thing is more in Glen's line, to think up some project of that sort. I think Muir would rather just stick to selling books.

DOCTER: Of course, Muir does some printing himself, doesn't he?

CHENEY: I don't know whether he's done any in late years. He used to.

DOCTER: He used to at least get out a Christmas card now and then, but I haven't seen one for a while.

CHENEY: I think he's sort of letting it lie there. He's keeping his press, just in case he should want to print again.

DOCTER: He has a Pilot press, doesn't he?

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: And a little handpress, too. I remember your telling me in 1960 that a handpress was just a beautiful thing, but it was nothing to print on. I had just gotten a handpress, an Albion handpress, and I was very enthusiastic, at the time, about printing on a handpress. I thought that would just be the most wonderful experience there could be. I soon learned what you were driving at. It's just too difficult to print on.

CHENEY: Yes. Well, I didn't mean you couldn't print on them. You can print on them, and I suppose there are those who enjoy them, but I didn't want to fool with it because you couldn't do any better work on one than you could on a job platen press. And just for appearance and amusement and atmosphere, one might have one, but if you're more interested in the content and what you're doing than you are in the process of printing, I think it's better to have a platen press.

DOCTER: More practical.

CHENEY: Because you can print fast enough on one of them. Of course, if you're actually going into commercial work, in the days when they did do letterpress, why, then you needed a cylinder press. But for the kind of work that some of us did, why, a platen press was sufficient.

DOCTER: We've talked a little about your own life history, and a little about the beginnings of your experience in printing, and some things about impressions of other printers and their work. Now, in terms of your own work as a printer, I think you mentioned you had hopes of perhaps getting another Pilot press and maybe moving it all into the bedroom here. Anything definite about that so far?

CHENEY: Well, I decided I could make out with this Kelsey. Muir called me a week or two ago, and said that he knew of a Pilot press I could have for \$125. Someone, one of their customers, had an opportunity to buy it, but she wasn't sure whether she wanted it or not; and if anybody else that they knew wanted it, why, she wouldn't get it. I told Muir that if it's in good condition, as prices go now, that was a very good buy, and he ought to urge her to get it if she had any need for a press. It was a very good buy on it. I think the Pilots run up \$350, something like that, now. Time I got mine, back in '48, it cost about \$95.

DOCTER: New or used?

CHENEY: New.

DOCTER: New!

CHENEY: Yes, but they're way up now. But, anyway, this Kelsey I have will do me now. I didn't want to get involved

in more. I've had three little presses in six months, and I think I'll stick with this last one that I have now. It isn't as good as a Pilot, but it's good enough.

DOCTER: Gets the job done.

CHENEY: Well, as long as I select jobs, it'll do. But I don't think I'll think up anything that's difficult for it. I'll try to find things that are easy for the little press.

DOCTER: You started out with an old proof press. I wondered if you wouldn't want to wind up with a proof press?

CHENEY: Well, they take more space, they're heavier, and you have to have a place to put them. This stood on a cabinet, and, well, if you know the size of an ordinary small proof press, it was maybe four feet long. And they're heavy. And, of course, they're much slower than the clam-shell platen. You have to ink it by hand each time--lay the paper down on it, lift the paper up, and then ink it again. Little faster than the handpress, such as you're speaking of, I mean, the Albion-type or Washington-type handpress. They're faster than that, but not much faster.

DOCTER: Well, do you think you'll be able to move your shop into the bedroom here?

CHENEY: Well, I don't know. You'll have to ask my wife about that. She's got a sewing room in there. But I hadn't intended to move the type cases in, just the table

with the press on it, so that I could have light to print. It's pretty dark out in the garage, and cold on winter days. I can string a light out to there, but then I'd have to take it down every night. Couldn't leave it up in the rain. Not a very comfortable place to work. It's also crowded.

DOCTER: Why did you leave the Clark?

CHENEY: Well, because I was done with it. I mean, I didn't want to stay there and do more of their seminar papers, and so on. The type was getting worn out

DOCTER: The deal was, you had to help them out from time to time.

CHENEY: Well, yes, I had to do the work that they had to do. And sometimes there were three or four things at a time; other times, there was nothing to do. It meant a considerable type composition. And, of course, the professors there, at the seminars, they didn't know how much work was involved, and that some things are not set by hand anymore.

DOCTER: Exactly. It seems to me they were pretty unrealistic in what they asked you to do there.

CHENEY: Well, I think [William] Conway understood the situation, but some of them, like Professor Novak--he wanted--oh, for giving some seminar talk, he wanted everything listed in one 8 1/2 x 11 form set solid. And he

wanted it by next week or a shorter time. That sort of thing was done all the time back in the nineteenth century, but it isn't done anymore. You can't buy type the way you could then. You may have to wait a long time for your type, and you don't want to lay in that much body type. You smash it up on jobs like that.

DOCTER: Right. Well, did you talk with Conway about this and try to smooth out the amount that they expected of you?

CHENEY: No, I didn't. He was always between the forces, trying to--that's his job, anyway--always trying to balance between irreconcilable opposites and make them work out. I didn't want to make any more problems for him that I could. These things were all possible to do. It's possible to satisfy those professors and set something by hand. It might as well just be typed and Xeroxed copies made.

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: You can do it, but it's such foolishness when such things aren't done anymore. Some things that aren't done anymore you like to do, because you want to do that kind of work, like these miniature books and certain kinds of hand setting. It may not be consonant with the times, but you get a pleasure out of it. But I didn't get any pleasure out of hand setting whole pages like that, that ought simply to have been typed.

DOCTER: Absolutely. Well, couldn't you just go to Conway,

and tell him, "Look, this is foolish. If I'm to be here printing, I just can't do so much of this nonsense."

What would happen if you told him that?

CHENEY: Well, he'd try to smooth it out, try to work out something. Just be more problem for him. But then I wasn't unwilling to do it, I just--I'd rather get out of a position where it had to be done. In other words, while I was there, I felt that I ought to do things like that to justify my being here, because that's what they wanted.

DOCTER: It seems to me they missed the boat, that they should have asked you to do maybe one announcement a year, or something like that; that it's really an honor to have you on the premises designing and printing things.

CHENEY: Well, I don't know whether it is or not. Those things are just ephemeral; that's the trouble with it. That's what I really meant when I said you don't hand-set things like that, hand-set things that are read once and thrown on the floor--programs for meetings and so forth, where you do an immense amount of handsetting and it doesn't mean any more to the people that get it than if it were simply typed and Xeroxed.

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: That's the discouraging part of it. I don't know whether it's any particular honor to do those things. Bill Conway and Edna Davis would save their copies, but not many

other people would. But as long as I was there, I wanted to do what they needed; they needed certain things. It wasn't just what I would prefer to do; it's what the Clark Library needed. And I was there, taking up space; it was a place where I could do my own work, so I felt that I should do anything they needed. And it wasn't too much work, although there'd be three or four things they'd need at once and need it pretty fast, and there'd be a month, sometimes, when they needed almost nothing. Wasn't a very hard job there.

DOCTER: But there was the sense of obligation.

CHENEY: Well, yes, there was a sense of obligation. I didn't mind that; it's just that I didn't like to hand set and smash up the type and use the press on something that there's no point in setting in type in the first place.

DOCTER: Exactly. That arrangement was originally fixed up by Powell, wasn't it? Didn't he invite you there?

CHENEY: Well, yes. Sort of collusion, with Glen Dawson and Powell, I guess, and Conway. I was moving out of that place up on La Cienega, and Munn was going to take it over for his picture framing place. And it's kind of hard to find a place to go. I could find little shops on the street, but I didn't want drop-in trade.

DOCTER: No.

CHENEY: Kind of hard to find a place to go where I could

do my work, and have my press, and so forth; and I think it was Glen that thought of Clark Library first. He and Powell worked it out.

DOCTER: And how many years were you there?

CHENEY: Oh, about twelve years. You were asking why I ever quit there, but it seems to me twelve years is long enough.

DOCTER: It's quite a long time, really. You know, speaking of Powell, I recall that you printed a broadside for Powell, in the Southwest broadside series. Is that his first?

CHENEY: Let's see, by William Comfort?

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: Somebody like that. Yes, I think it was the first in the series. Started off with me, kind of a small specimen of a broadside. The later broadsides that others did were much larger. I never could see much point in a broadside. You can't read them sitting down; have to stand up to read them, and there's nowhere to put them. Put them on the wall for a while, then you take them down from there. And then they get folded and put in the closet. Then they fall down on the floor, there, and finally they wind up in the garage and finally fall on the floor, there, and the car runs over them. There's not much you can do with broadsides.

DOCTER: Well, you'll be glad to know that I have yours nicely framed and hanging up where it's perfectly safe, inside the house.

CHENEY: That's all right, but there are only so many broadsides that you can frame and hang up.

DOCTER: That's true.

CHENEY: And that's not satisfactory, either. What I mean is, you can't read them sitting down; you've got to get up and stand by the wall and read them. 'Tisn't like a book that you can sit down and read or take to bed with you.

DOCTER: What arrangements did Powell make with printers to get those done?

CHENEY: Just ordered them done. Gave them a copy, and contacted the printer and asked if they'd do it. As I recall, he paid for them. I think he paid me for mine; I don't know. As I recall, he did; I don't think they were just done for the love of it. They were done as jobs.

DOCTER: If a person were to contact you right now, just a stranger, say, come to the door, perhaps, would you do a business card for him? Would you be able to take on that kind of a job?

CHENEY: I could, but I wouldn't. It'd be a bit inconvenient. Cases are stacked on top of one another; I'd have to dig around, pile them all over the garage floor

to find the one that has the type in it and put it up on the table where I can get at it, and then I'd have slow work on this little hand platen. And it wouldn't be worthwhile doing cards. He might as well go to a regular printer, a commercial printer, and get the card job done. I could do it, in the sense that it's physically possible, but I wouldn't want to do it. And as for card Gothics, I think you got my card Gothics.

DOCTER: Copperplate Gothics?

CHENEY: Yes, copperplate Gothic, and I don't know whether you got the bank Gothic or not.

DOCTER: Yes. I think two or three sizes.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: That's nice for the main line, isn't it, in a card?

CHENEY: Well, yes, you use it for all the lines if you're setting it in copperplate Gothic.

DOCTER: No, I meant the bank. The heavier, bank Gothic.

CHENEY: Yes.

DOCTER: It's a very bold . . .

CHENEY: Well, it's just squared off; it's no bolder than the copperplate. I think you're thinking of something else.

DOCTER: I'm thinking of the--is it called bankers. . . ?

CHENEY: Well, bankers', stationers' Gothic or bank Gothic. You're thinking of something else, which is a Roman face.

DOCTER: Yes.

CHENEY: Very contrasting thick and thin--can't, offhand, think of the name of that. It's called Title--engraver's . . .

DOCTER: That's it.

CHENEY: Engraver's bold, that is.

DOCTER: That's it. You sold me a couple of sizes of that. I've really enjoyed it very much. I got quite a few cases to put that type in, and I'm gradually getting it distributed; as I need a certain size, I put it in the cases. I've got most of the Baskerville put away now. Well, this has been a most helpful series of interviews, and on behalf of the Oral History Program at UCLA, and on my behalf, and on behalf of anyone who may read this in years to come and enjoy it, learn something from it, I'd like to sincerely say thank you for taking this time and sharing these things with us.

CHENEY: Well, I want to thank you for thinking that I'm worthwhile to interview. I haven't much information to give, but I'm glad to do it, for what it's worth.

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